

# UNITAS

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**The Power  
of Preaching**

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**The Preaching  
of Power**



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# UNITAS

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## **The Power of Preaching/ The Preaching of Power**

A Criticism  
of Popular Preaching  
in the Philippines

**CLARENCE VICTOR C. MARQUEZ, OP**



Indexed in the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America

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## In This Issue

UNITAS takes pride in its new cover design which marks off this issue as an interface of the old and new: an established multidisciplinary journal with the longest history in the Philippines even as it is also an academic publication that embraces in its pages major developments in research and scholarship in the 21st century.

Equally taking pride of place in this issue is *The Power of Preaching/The Preaching of Power: A Criticism of Popular Preaching in the Philippines* by Clarence Victor C. Marquez, OP, which marks an important stage in a kind of “monographic turn” of UNITAS. In this age of growing specialization, the monograph, defined as a “a highly detailed and thoroughly documented study or paper written about a limited area of a subject or field of inquiry,” has made its presence felt more prominently as a scholarly output in UNITAS, although the research paper has largely continued to be the dominant “genre” in mainstream academic journal publications.

Preaching, the focus of this monograph, is sometimes considered an ambiguous word; yet, it is also assumed to be a potent act or event that is often suggestive of power and authority. At the most basic level, to preach in the context of, say, institutional religion, is generally associated with the simple act of delivering a sermon in order to present the good news. But apart from its denotative and descriptive meaning, the term is deeply connotative and tends to be highly emotive from which tendency it partly draws its extraordinary sense of “holy capital.” In particular, to preach also means to advocate certain beliefs or urge compliance with certain standards. As such, this monograph argues that preaching is not just a neutral act of delivering a sermon about religion; it puts forth a certain position with the end in view of converting the audience. In short, it is implicated in power; it is a site of contestation; it is political.

As a political communicative event, preaching and its social and political dimensions are brought into focus in this study. Notably, the analysis systematically deals with how power is embedded in the practice of preaching of the famous Dominican preacher Fr. Erasmo “Sonny” Ramirez, OP, marking out its distinguishing features. Broadly working with categories that fall under the rubric of what is generally referred to as critical discourse analysis within the framework of literary and cultural studies, the study investigates the rhetorical, literary and linguistic make-up of the preacher’s text in the larger context of culture and social relations. In the close reading of the sermons which mediate between the word of God and the everyday life of Philippine society, the theological and pastoral text is shown to be loaded with ideological power in the concrete practice of Fr. Ramirez whose “preaching is shown to effect/affect the communication of truth, and the creation of belief, on the one hand, as well as the power to control societal life, on the other.”

# Abstract

This study is an investigation of the institutional practice of preaching, held crucial and central in the propagation and regulation of Christian life and discourse, particularly through the example of the famous Dominican preacher Fr. Erasmo “Sonny” Ramirez, OP. With the practice of preaching by Fr. Ramirez as main exhibit and focus of analysis, this study seeks to prove that preaching is a political act. By employing and interposing the pronouncements of faith and the subtle machinations of secular rhetoric and institutional discipline, preaching is shown to effect/affect the communication of truth, and the creation of belief, on the one hand, as well as the power to control societal life, on the other.

## **Keywords**

Order of Preachers, preaching, popular rhetoric, sermon/homily, Foucault, power/knowledge, socio-rhetorical criticism, discursive theories and practices



# Introduction

*"I charge you to preach the word, to stay with this task whether convenient or inconvenient correcting, reproof, appealing - constantly teaching and never losing patience."*

(2 Timothy 4:2)

Life seeks a story, a rendition of significance, a word about its world, a telling of its living and its meaning. Yet what it desires is more than a mere matter-of-fact account, beyond the simple dimensions of "once upon a time" and "living happily ever after." Life seeks more. What it seeks now is a reading between its lines, beyond its lines, against its lines. Not a definitive explanation of itself, but a deconstruction, a subversion, a criticism true to its name, splitting atoms, exploding myths, unsettling sense. As with all stories, this one begins *in medias res*. One always already is someone who writes about something, which is somewhat, related to this same someone. It is the sense of being thrown into life, being there (Heidegger's *Dasein*) somewhere in the cesspool of existence.

This story is about preaching, understood as a species of religion and/or rhetoric. Preaching is an Activity of the Word, taken in the Christian sense as Divine Person and Utterance—original, sacral and salvific. Preaching is an activity of the word, taken as human instrumentation and communication, significantly spoken or scribbled, situated, finite in intention and infinite in interpretation. Thus, this enterprise of the Word-word proves to be a

two-edged sword addressed by or to the deity and or addressed by or to humanity.

But this is also a story behind preaching. For every word said leaves the traces of a whole world unsaid. Preaching presupposes a space for its craft, a silence for its meditative configuration both in its addresser and addressee—gaps/gasps for breath and pauses for punctuations and blank sheets for its *ink*-scriptions. And these allow for a free play of signifiers and sanctifiers where the immeasurable darkness defies dogma, and faith becomes more personal in its methods and meanings.

And, this is a story against preaching, read against itself, against its gracious grain. The “profane” literary criticism of preaching demonizes its sacred texts, suspects and suggests an otherworldly message. Bracketing off the things of God (that is theology’s territory), this story aims for a contemporary exegesis of preaching. Humbled by history and suspicious of hierarchy, it hopes to rediscover how much is still and always already human in preaching.

This story is set in the Philippines, about preaching that echoes through an archipelago nebulously religious. The Spanish conquistadores preached the cross and brandished the sword, to “discover” us and save us from paganistic darkness and drag us into the light of “Christian civilization.” Preaching reduced us into townspeople and church people, clothed us, baptized us, taught us and terrified us with “fire and brimstone.” Preaching made us ourselves, built upon these lands churches and pulpits, and plazas and towns. Preaching was the power that held us and the reason that kept us. It dazzled us with a cosmogony of heaven and hell, maintained by a *Petri*-fied church, which taught us infallibly on matters of faith and morals. It instilled in us obedience and patient endurance and eternal rewards for sacrifice and martyrdom.

Our culture has borne this preaching on its back. Like flesh struggling against the spirit, we have benumbed ourselves with its themes and techniques. From the Sunday pulpits to jam-packed coliseums to mammoth park rallies, we have flocked to it—sometimes fanatically, sometimes faithfully, and sometimes fatally. We have listened to divine mandate explained in human terms, clung to promises of prosperity, hoped for health, repented of cataclysms, endorsed candidates, overthrown governments. Such is



the power of preaching now. Yet as the separation of Church and State continues to be diversely contended, preaching has taken on ambiguous and often conflicting religious political functions. Sermons about the kingdom of heaven turn out to be the canonization of political regimes; denunciation of sin is crusade against bureaucratic corruption.

But the political intent and content of preaching can not only be confined to pastoral letters, to the obviously moral, i.e. political, actuation of preachers and religious leaders. It is the subtle ways, the ordinary preaching on ordinary days, which prescribe and persuade, captivate and elevate, which touch and torment, which anoint and reject, which predisposes power, determines power, wills it and wields it over the faithful. It is this power of preaching, this preaching of power which is delivered with regularity, exercised and obeyed with piety, which is now brought forth under suspicion of criticism and explored in this study.

### **Preaching as Power**

Preaching as discourse on “eternal truths” is verily a discourse of power, which interpellates its subjects (preachers and audience) and objects (sacred texts and the secular renditions) and sets them in a complex constellation of meaning and relations. The delivery of the Christian message through preaching and its corollary disciplines (the sacraments, liturgy, spiritual direction, private devotion and prayer, and the whole gamut of ecclesiastical affairs) involves a “history” and a formation in ways and why’s, generally assumed but not always examined, of a highly ideological and political nature.

The Power of Preaching is not only something passively received from the divine in order to transmit some salvific, other-worldly message to some other passive human audience. It is also a Preaching of Power, a perpetuation of itself, through its truths and persuasions, an active and evolving construction of discipline over elements and forces and subjects, clothed and hidden behind the holy veil of the sacred, the innocent and noble task of evangelization and salvation of souls.

This study first sets out to ask, (1) How is the discourse of preaching? How is preaching as a discursive practice? It seeks to explore the ways and conditions, which allow for the consideration of preaching as a specific “discourse.” This would be a re-explanation of the institution of preaching

in terms of Michel Foucault's critical insights into the modes and material practice of knowledge and power in society.

In order to concretely ground this theoretical connection of preaching as a discourse of knowledge/power, this study then poses the question (2) How is preaching to be read? This would seek to establish the textuality and viability of the preaching enterprise for literary and critical reading. By employing Vernon Robbin's socio-rhetorical approach to criticism, a specific preaching text (Fr. Sonny Ramirez' televised homily) shall be opened up for a multiple, interdisciplinary, and interpretive analytics.

Finally, (3) How is the politics of such preaching? This would seek to construct and deconstruct a political reading of the preaching text, in order to bring to critical light the ideological undertones and overtones, spawned by the preaching discourse.

### Theology and Politics

"Of what interest is a preacher's sermon?" the Editor's Introduction to the *Sermones of Fray Francisco Blancas de San Jose, OP*, asks (xviii). The query grounds itself upon the apparent irrelevance of such a medieval piece of rhetoric with its long-deceased author, its antiquated but flowery form of a current language, and its old-fashioned theology. But the ancient ground proves to be a still fertile landscape for criticism and study.

Growing interest in the study of sermons as texts and speech-events has emerged as a result of several developments. First, greater sensitivity to the functional nature of discourse and the distinct quality of orality has been instrumental in rescuing rhetoric from the realm of the decorative and the occasional. Preaching sermons is once more regarded as a legitimate rhetorical exercise employing complex techniques of argumentation and persuasion. Moreover, the texts of sermons from the past have proven useful materials in the study of issues not commonly found in traditional documentary sources. (Francisco xviii)

The publication of the *sermones* pushes forth a conversation of times and theories, retrieving themes and motifs, deciphering life behind the text, resurrecting the word and reincarnating it for today.

Javellana, for instance, in delineating the "primary literary context of Blancas' sermons," notes that "the sermon wove an oral world for the native

catechumen,” (Francisco 289) one in which “Tagalog experiences within a new context and proposing a world peopled by idealized biblical figures which stood authoritatively outside both the Tagalog and the Spanish (Castilian) world (Francisco 321).” And this creation is achieved through preaching which is “foremost an act, a performance and not merely the reading of a tract” (Francisco 298), but which was shaped by the congregation, real or imagined.

Sermons as text reveal a vitality transcending contexts. One enters into such by a fusion or fission of perspectives. The veil of culture spares no one from being untouched, unadulterated. F.N. R. Rodriguez notes:

*“Sa pagsasakatutubo ng mga konseptong Kristiyano, lumilitaw sa teksto na kinakailangang makibagay muna si Blancas sa mundo ng katutubo upang maipaliwanag niya ang isang konsepto sa katutubo. Kinakailangang kausapin niya ang katutubo mula sa loob ng mundong ginagalawan ng katutubo. Ang pagsasakatutubo ng Kristiyanong pananampalataya ay hindi tatalab hangga’t hindi gagamitin ni Blancas ang mga halimbawa na kabahagi mismo ng buhay ng katutubo.”*

But horizons as frontiers of meaning may also turn out to be hinterlands of subversion. In the process of Christianization, with the sermon as a crucial ingredient, what is said is not always what is meant in its conveyance and reception. The terms of colonialism are not as one-sided as previously thought. Studies of sermons as events of meaning interface with the present investigation of preaching. Beyond the expressed forms of ecclesial discourse—from medieval and colonial sermons to contemporary popular homilies—preaching froths with significance, sometimes simplistic, sometimes seismic, sometimes surreal, all the time leaving and leading to a whole world of the unsaid.

Vernon Robbins introduces and employs an integrative socio-rhetorical approach to criticism that “focuses on literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in texts” as he tries to unravel *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*.

Launching upon a fundamental assumption that “texts are performances of language and [that] language is a part of the inner fabric of society, culture, ideology and religion,” Robbins explores a “thick description” (C. Geertz) of biblical texts indicative of the development of early Christianity, setting “the multiple contexts of interpretation into dialogue with one another” (Robbins

9) through “four arenas of texture... (1) inner texture; (b) intertexture; (3) social and cultural texture; and (4) ideological texture.”

Of particular interest in the present study is the assertion that “every theology has a politics.” And criticism’s goal is “to display the inner nature of multiple power plays at work in the discourse through interdisciplinary strategies of analysis and interpretation.” It puts under critical light the presupposition that “narrator of a New Testament text is right and others in the historical context are wrong ... that those who were victorious were right” (Robbins 235), and goes on to challenge the ‘authorized version’ of the history of first-century Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles, and constructs an alternative account on the basis of data in all first-century Christian texts available to us. In other words, reconceptualizing history as an interplay between perpetuation and formation of culture, the approach places all New Testament texts in a laboratory of data about first-century Christianity and negotiates the historical, social, cultural and ideological dimensions of the data in these texts. It creates an environment where the interpreter puts ‘great traditions’ and ‘little traditions’ on as level a playing field as possible in the context of data available to us.

The whole issue of canonicity, central in orthodox Biblical criticism, is enclosed in brackets and sacred texts are made to stand the rigors of profane sciences and contemporary cultural studies, provoking a textual and inter-textual battle for meaning and power.

In *Contracting Colonialism*, Vicente Rafael points out “language as out of control”, suggesting “a distinctive Tagalog strategy of decontextualizing the means by which colonial authority represents itself... seeing other possibilities in those words” (Rafael 216). On the one hand, missionary preachers translated Christianity into vernacular terms comprehensible to the natives; on the other hand, the natives re-translated Christianity with its colonial import into terms subversive of their ideology, deflected of its power, altered in its senses.

Christian conversion and colonial rule emerged through what appeared to be a series of mistranslations ... (as) ways to render the other understandable. Each group read into the other’s language and behavior possibilities that the original speakers had not intended or foreseen. For the Spaniards, translation was always a matter of reducing the native language and culture to accessible objects for and subjects of divine and imperial intervention. For

the Tagalogs, translation was a process less of internalizing colonial-Christian conventions than of evading their totalizing grip by repeatedly marking the differences between their language and interests and those of the Spaniards. (Rafael 211)

In the event of sermons, the addressees play an active function. The preacher's word as bearer of divine truth is immediately confronted by a suspicious silence—resistant, defiant, wrestling with statements: creatively and subversively critical.

But the scripts of sermons are the pre-performance stage of preaching, as written text committed to memory, delivered in oratory, incarnated in praxis. There is no purely religious statement, in the sense of a closed spiritualized process. The people of God on earth are aptly called the Church militant, i.e. an army of the good locked in struggle against the forces of evil. In the contracting of Christianity and Colonialism, with, by, and against the people, preaching comes forward in the present study to serve and protect the discourse and discipline.

In *Pasyon and Revolution*, Reynaldo Ileto rewrites “history from below,” arguing the case for popular, lower class-led militia movements in the Philippines. They who have been thought of as uneducated, rural, “passive, acceptors of change”, “bandits, ignoramuses, heretics, lunatics, fanatics, and failures” (Ileto 256) are now put in the limelight of historical re-evaluation.

One of the principal ideas developed in this study is that the masses' experience of Holy Week fundamentally shaped the style of peasant brotherhoods and uprisings during the Spanish and early American colonial periods. (Ileto 11)

It re-interprets apparently political acts, as launching rebellions and pursuing revolutions, as also acts of faith, as civic and militant renditions of the religious *Pasyon*, defying tyranny, enduring martyrdom, gaining freedom and other eternal rewards. “Religion was not just devotion to God and concern with the supernatural, but a way of organizing their daily lives. Appropriated from the friars, religion gave form to peasant hopes for brotherhood and more equitable economic relationships” (Ileto 255).

Faith assertions and statements from texts such as the sermon and preaching are ripe for critical picking and re-appraisal—from the oral worlds

they conjure, the knots of translation and conversion they tie, to the militancy they flaunt. As the past has proven to be a fertile ground, so the present state of preaching, of religious rhetoric—with the complications brought about by mass media technology—emerges as a potent site of struggle for significance.

Thus, what preaching means is not always what preaching gets, is not always what is received and remembered by people. The present study suggests that the effects of preaching burst through dams of dogma and definition, drown the preacher in whirlpools of meaning, and sweep away the people into the open seas of political ideology and practical, partisan interests.

*Rem tene; Verba sequentur.* (“Seize the thing; the words will follow.”)

Cato

## Personal is Political

The personal is always already the nearer reason for undertaking this kind of scholarly exploration. Yet the personal isn’t always the most known; perhaps, it is the least known, the hardly known. Religion’s mystery is not only in its message, but also in its medium. Preaching the truth of faith, with all the contraptions of “fire and brimstone,” comes across as performance, as purposive configuration of craft and content, as discourse of making and meaning. Homiletics—the academic course on homilies—deals not only with the coherence of theological content, but also with the repertoire of its conveyance, from toastmasters’ training to theatrical simulation. Thus, what is immediately measured is not sincerity, but effectiveness—signified by the size of the listening crowd, the expansion of the coffers, and the preacher’s stature of moral influence, in spheres other-than-religious, e.g. politics, economics, show business, etc.

But the personal is also always already political. Truth is not as innocent as the heavens. It is earth-bound, therefore time-bound—evolving and revolting. It is soiled in the struggles of life. It is not only the monarch of Rationality’s regime, but also the demon of insurrection, of the low-life of unconsciousness/subconsciousness. Its pronouncement is not only premised on pure objectivity, but also diabolically possessed by deceitful subjectivities.

And in preaching, one unravels not only the power of words, but an overpowering of words, loading stealthy impartiality with subtle sureness. Thus, to preach religion is to preach things other than religious-economic analysis, popular sociology, personal vendetta, political propaganda, film reviews, journalistic criticism, fashion commentaries, comic relief, commercial endorsements, etc. The convoluted act of preaching is now brought before the surgical eyes of criticism.

In recent times, rhetoric has been resuscitated from the netherworld of debunked sophistry and re-established as a potent field for social investigation. Rhetoric is now joined to religion in this critique of the preaching institution. Preaching is a body of knowledge with a history. And this study attempts not a mere perusal of rhetorical devices, but a thick and multi-textured description of preaching as discursive practice and as textual performance.

### Re-reading the Rhetoric of Religion

Michel Foucault, the French philosopher and “archeologist of knowledge” provided a way of re-reading the rhetoric of religion, a post-modern critique of the institution and formation of preaching, and the delivery of sacred text in a secular context. He unearthed pervasive political and totalizing assumptions and relations that structure the forms of modern life.

It is a re-investigation of the power/knowledge relationship. Knowledge, contrary to its claims to truth, involves a pervasive artifice of domination by one group of “truth-seekers” and “truth-speakers” over another inferiorized group. Thus, power is:

conceived not as a property, but as a strategy... its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’ but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings: One should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess. (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 20)

This power is not so much a form of coercion, but of “**subject-ion,**” i.e. a process of producing power-notions (belief) and relations of subjects, in subjects. “Power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge,

nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 27).

Preaching involves a body of knowledge, historically accrued and socially accepted, that is taught and perpetuated, not only for the ideals of noble evangelization, but also, pervasively and persuasively, for the invention of the “preacher,” that man of the Word (he is always already a man), that defines a function in and of modern society.

“It is all about space, about language, and about death...”, Michel Foucault claimed that society makes itself and understands itself in terms of the places it occupies, the rational discourse it generates about itself, the definitions of its scope and limitations (like any term paper). “It is about the act of seeing, the gaze” (Foucault *Birth of the Clinic* ix). More concretely, this means that all human activity must then be necessarily seen as political action, as assertion over some other thing which must be then seen from some higher vantage point, ergo more important, ergo more powerful in any society. There are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and...

constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 93)

Thus, institutions in society, respected and deemed necessary for the maintenance of order, are in fact expressions of political relations, as society’s way of constructing a norm for itself, as opposing one group to another, as valorizing “one” as “prior,” as “positive,” as “enlightened,” as “ordered” vis-à-vis the “other” as “inferior,” as “negative,” as “dark,” as “chaos.” As “archeologist”, Foucault unearthed the pretentious assumptions of societal claims to rationality, to equality, to truth, to virtue, to the perfection of life itself:

Truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power... truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth, i.e., the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and



false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 131)

Society “invents” itself in the truths it fosters, including religion. It decides the space (the church as central, the sanctuary as central, the pulpit as central); it teaches the method (schools of theology), trains its ministers.

He also investigated such societal constructions as “normal/abnormal,” revealing “madness” as a way for certain sectors in society to exclude those who do not follow the “usual” track of mind. He retraced the *History of Sexuality* (in three volumes, 1976, 1984), in order to re-account for the widespread repression and perverted secrecy about sex, the invention of taboo to define the accepted sexual activities and to decry the unaccepted ones. He deconstructed the institutionalized modern societal activities in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), those judged, sentenced, confined, and condemned by the “authorities” as “criminal” elements inimical to society. These marginalized sectors are the bearers of what is called:

subjugated knowledge... those blocs of historical knowledge, which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematic theory—which criticism has been able to reveal. (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 81-82)

Preaching as discourse assumes addressees as passive, as external to the act and event of preaching. Yet they too have something to say, with their silence, their gestures of attention and inattention, their approving gaze, their deceptive manifestation of interest, their misconstrued respect and fear of the tremors and tantrums of the preacher.

Crucial then to Foucault’s critical thesis is the gaze signifying the insidious political intent and content of human societal action. To see is affirmed as modern society’s rational insistence and obsession, to see is to know, to see is to believe, to see is to bring to light, to see the truth for ourselves. But seeing is also relational. One sees another and to see means to exercise some form of power over that other. What I see, I know. What I know is what I take into my mind, from outside (abstraction and intentionality). As I take inside what was formerly outside, “I” takes over: it is “my” terms; “my” power

holds; the other's being captured and known. Theology's light is not only from the divine grace of faith, but also from one's prejudiced subjectivity. So how we see God and related things is how we want it to be, how it must be— isolated and identified to its minutest elements (as in polarized and scriptural exegesis)—fixed in dogma, moralized, taught, preached, and prayed about.

So writing and reading and public speaking as “institutions” in society can be also seen as discourses of power, as ways of ordering text and meaning, by stating elements deemed “necessary” by craft, and silencing other elements deemed “unfit” for the integral health of the text. The body of the sacred text as an organic whole is exegetically cut-up in criticism and seen through theory in order to make its “inherent” meaning—its previously unseen sense—emerge and appreciated. Thus art subordinates nature, and criticism subverts art—asserting power, snatching power, resisting power, overthrowing power, overpowering power itself by itself, against itself for the sake of holiness and beauty and life to mean not what is dominantly imposed, but what is pro-actively achieved and asserted.

So, why draw from this framework in the reading of preaching? The acts of institutional religion have always claimed political innocence. Pronouncements of the Church and in the Church are not supposed to carry partisan, secular interests, but only the divinely revealed truth of faith and morals.

But power remains a specter, haunting all ecclesial discourse. Power is there, has always been there. And the modesty of reluctance becomes naïve perversity, when preaching grows afraid of the political shadows that it conjures.

So, this search for the politics of preaching is an effort at removing pretenses. Through a hard and honest look at what preaching has always been, Church, preacher and preaching may hope to feel at home with discourse, and may learn to wield power in freedom and grace.

## **The Formation and Performance of Preaching**

This study hopes to hold a critical focus on the formation and performance of preaching, as exemplified within the Order of Preachers. Preaching admittedly is not endemic to the Dominicans, yet its very title bears and bares a primacy and a privilege—overly-assumed and legendary—which makes it most viable (*ergo*, vulnerable) for a critical re-reading.

For the purpose of this study, a preaching performance by “Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP” televised and recorded on and through modern means of social communications, i.e. mass media technology, shall be considered as the main text for criticism. Lionized by the media, Fr. Sonny Ramirez, is disputably the most popular Filipino Dominican of our time. He has the heft and the heaviness, fame and friendliness, charisma, theatrics, music, humor, emotional exuberance, temper, controversy, and power within ecclesiastical circles and the secular fields, including show business and politics.

So, why choose Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP as text for criticism? Without straying into the psychoanalytic suggestion of some subconscious oedipal slaying of dominant father/authority figures in one’s life, the study begs the choice itself. That Fr. Sonny is known personally and extolled popularly draws this resistant reading as firefly to flame. It is a discourse of love and death, of fascination and fierce uneasiness, of exposing this fragile life to the blows of honest irreverence, of putting under scrutiny the hidden wounds of preaching, in the hope of defrocking its pretensions, enduring its pains, and living on and through this moment of critical freedom and creative grace.

However, what shall be read is not blatantly political speech, but an “ordinary”, “harmless” liturgical preaching. The reason for this more apparently innocent option is the proposition that politics is always already present in all preaching; that evangelization, even in its pristine form, is a power issue, as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen. To preach about heaven and its sublime realities is to set up some discourse of knowledge and domination over a still lesser and lower earth.

### **Preaching as an Institutional Practice**

This is a story of texts and texts of a story. Preaching as an institutional practice within the Church involves a formation within a framework of knowledge and power-relations.

First, this study attempts to render preaching as specific form of discourse of knowledge and power in human society. It proffers the medieval text of Humbert of Romans’ *On the Formation of the Preacher* as an instrument of description and definition, distinction and division vis-à-vis the provocations of Michel Foucault on the discourse of Power/Knowledge. Then, by detailed “cross texture,” preaching is made to confront and recognize itself in

the colored mirror of political discourse: in its objects, its subject-agents, its norms and its disciplines.

Secondly, it introduces a socio-rhetorical criticism of a text of preaching—language as performance—the text called “Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP”—with all its media enhancement and concealment. With this approach, the study first goes formalist: unfurling the elaborate inner textures of preaching: its opening-middle-closing, its repetitions and sequences, the logical construction of its argument, the plotting of its narrational voices and postures, the employment of aesthetic-sensorial techniques, etc.

Thirdly, it pushes the socio-rhetorical reading further. The study moves from the formalist, internal project to the investigation of the contextual, extra textual effluence of the media preaching. By a thick description and critical interpretation of intertexture (oral-scribal, historical), the social and cultural texture (specific topics, common topics, final categories), and the ideological texture (in the text and in interpretations), the study probes for the political intention and contention of preaching.

Finally, the study concludes with a recapitulation of the questions posed and the answers offered in the discussion on the critical reading of the politics of preaching and the preaching of politics.

# Discourse of Preaching

*"You have given yourselves to the proclamation of the Word of God, preaching the name of the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world."*

(Fundamental Constitution of the Order of Friars Preachers, 1)

How does one begin a history of self? The task of self-reflection proves to be a total (and totalizing) temptation. Yet to stand outside the discourse generated by such a reflex activity of looking back and looking within remains philosophically and existentially untenable. **One always already is in discourse that makes one be.** The text of self is ever in context, related and relative to the specific dimensions that define and delimit it, contained and detained by the exigencies of its emergence. The things that stand outside and around (*circumstance*) are not mere accidents of being, but "confluent" and influential in the determination. Such realization humbles the truth, makes the self un-self-ish, and thereby, makes it more human.

We set out to ask: "How is the discourse of Preaching?" in order to explore the ways and conditions which allow for the consideration of preaching as a specific "discourse." This is to be done by positing a revered source-book of Dominican preaching vis-à-vis the critical deployment of Michel Foucault's concept of "discourse."



Fig.1 Blessed Humbert of Romans, fifth Master of the Order of Preachers; author of the treatise, “On the Formation of Preachers”

### Humbert of Romans’ *On the Formation of Preachers*

In his monumental opus “*On the Formation of Preachers*,” Humbert of Romans, the fifth Master-General of the Order of Friars Preacher (1254-1263), unfolded

his vision of what it means to be, precisely, a preacher... someone defined totally and simply, as a preacher, someone whose whole life is, in principle, structured around his vocation as preacher. (Tugwell 2)

Such rendition of the treatise’s grandiose purpose puts the text at the heart and head of the medieval discourse on Dominican life and works. One cannot simply declassify it as another manual on the art of preaching. It is a work of serious thought for serious reading, devoid of “dramatic fervor

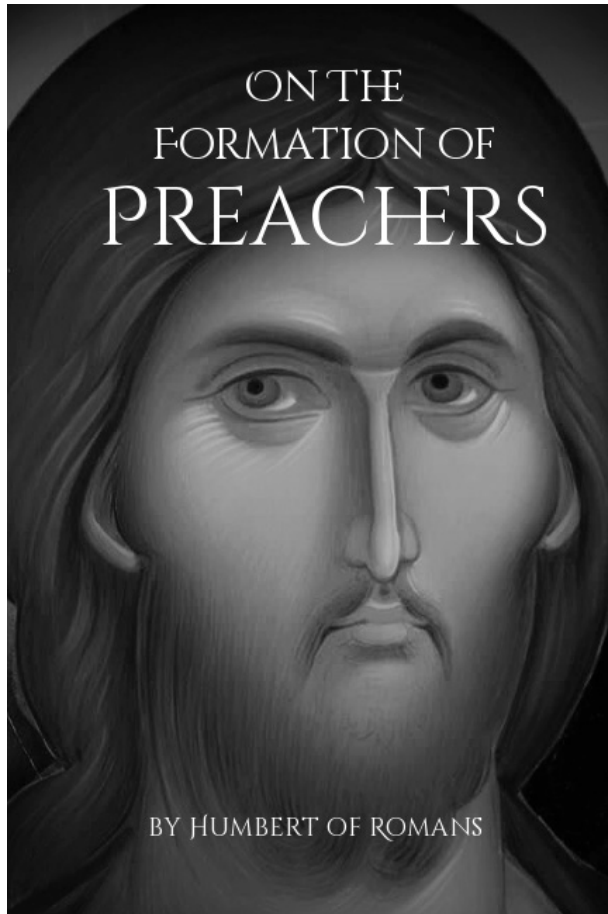


Fig.2 A reprinted version of Humbert of Roman's book "On the Formation of Preachers"

or emotional intensity”, typically scholarly, reeking with doctrinal discussions, scriptural citations and exegetical glosses, pertinent “facts”, generous allegories and accommodating anecdotes, straight and structured to the point, heady, heavy, a text of the highest order. It is a passionately dispassionate polemic on the specific being of the man called the preacher, *Homo Praedicator*.

It is a recommended reading for preachers of all colors and persuasions, a requisite tome in the libraries of canonical novitiates (site of my first naiveté), ecclesiastical faculties, pontifical and royal universities, schools of theology, seminaries, houses of formation, religious convents and residences, a veritable “classic of western spirituality.” It is a guide to the initiate (a primer), a reminder to them forgetful (a mnemonic device), a remembrance of things past (an artifact), a mirror of our present state of affairs (a representation), a construction of life (a text for criticism).

In it, Humbert listed the why’s, what’s, and how’s of the preaching vocation and mission, its excellence, its foundations and traditions, its conditions and functions, its rubrics and techniques, all “the KNOWLEDGE which a preacher needs for the job.”

To preach is to know; to know is to preach. Quite a simple equation. The articulation of sacred eloquence entails a primordial interiorization, an intellectualization of select truths. And to form one in the task of holy preaching is to ensure that one is equipped with the necessary know-how for such a noble task.

Humbert enumerated the kinds of knowledge necessary for a preacher:

First, there is knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, because all preaching ought to be taken from them.

Then, there is knowledge of creatures... creation is a book, and those who know how to read this book well draw from it many things which are very serviceable for helping people to grow...

Knowledge of historical stories... which can sometimes be very useful and edifying in a sermon.

The knowledge of the church’s precepts, which is important because people need to be instructed about many of them.

Knowledge of the church’s mysteries... and it contributes greatly to people’s edification to have these expounded to them.

There is experiential knowledge... in dealing with the state of man’s soul...

There is also the kind of knowledge, which is called discretion... (enabling) a man to know to whom the word of God ought not to be preached, and to whom it ought to be preached.

Finally there is knowledge of the Holy Spirit. It is this that makes up for what is lacking in all the other kinds of knowledge.



It is just that—an innocent listing of the knowing that accompanies preaching. It is not the knowledge found or drawn from preaching per se. But the knowledge from which preaching is drawn, the knowledge that presupposes and predisposes preaching. Yet it is not just that.

It is knowledge that has superiority written all over it. Knowledge of things is knowledge over things. A person enters into this order of knowledge, by attaining knowledge of order—God/Eternity, His Creation, His Prodigies, His Church, your soul, etc. Each is to be learned and revered in its proper order, in the hierarchy of necessary truths and the rung of eternal values. The person then becomes someone called a preacher, someone inscribed with/by authority, who becomes a man of knowledge by becoming someone with the knowledge of man, who he should be, how he should become. He then presides over the application of such know-how in the pronouncement of sacred and salvific truths.

As the knowledge of the preacher is registered, so too the other requisites: his virtues, his speech, his merits, his gender, his sacralized allegories—a taut tabulation of contents and intents, strata of syllogistic propositions, arduous arguments from multi-tiered authorities (scriptures, patristic glosses and commentaries, hagiographies and parabolic legends, etc.), deductions and reductions.

But the categories do not only list down; they also divide and multiply almost infinitely, classifying one vis-à-vis another, putting one over and ahead of another, differentiating one over another. Thus Humbert discussed the “RIGHT AND WRONG WAYS OF BECOMING A PREACHER.”

So the teacher must devise a sermon, which fits the quality of his congregation. There is one way to address men, another way to address women, one way for the young, another for the elderly, one way for the poor, another for the rich, one way for the cheerful, another for the sad, one way for subjects, another way for superiors, one way for servants, another way for masters, one way for those who are worldly wise, another for those who are dimwitted, one way for the shameless, another for those who are modest, one way for the insolent, another way for cowards, one way for the impatient, another way for those who are patient, one way for generous people, another way for mean people, one way for the innocent, another way for the impure, one way for the healthy, another way for the sick, one way for those who fear punishment and so live blamelessly, another for

those who are so hardened in their sin that they cannot even be corrected by punishment, one way for those who are taciturn, another way for those who talk too much, one way for the indolent, another way for the precipitate, one way for the gentle, another way for the irascible, one way for the humble, another way for the proud, one way for the grimly determined, another way for those who are always changing their minds, one way for the gluttonous, another way for the abstemious, one way for those who give generously of what belongs to them, another way for those who are always trying to get hold of other people's property, one way for those who neither steal what is not theirs nor give away anything that is theirs, another way for those who are generous with what is theirs, but also constantly stealing what is not theirs, one way for the quarrelsome, another way for the peaceful, one way for those who provoke quarrels, another way for those who make peace, one way for those who misunderstand the words of the holy law, another way for those who understand them rightly, but are not humble in the way they speak them, one way for those who could preach properly but are cowed by their humility, another way for those who are driven to preach by their own impetuosity, when they are really disqualified by immaturity or youthfulness, one way for those who are successful in their worldly ambition, another way for those who desire the good things of this world, but are wearied by the burden of bad luck, one way for those who are married, another way for those who are not, one way for those who have known carnal intercourse, another way for those who have not, one way for those who weep for actual sins, another way for those who weep for sins committed only in the mind, one way for those who weep for their sins but do not abandon them, another way for those who abandon them but do not weep for them, one way for those who actually approve of the sins they commit, another way for those who condemn wickedness but do not avoid it, one way for those who are overcome by sudden lust, another way for those who deliberately entangle themselves in sin, one way for those who sin frequently, though only in small things, and another way for those who keep clear of minor offenses but occasionally fall into serious sin, one way for those who do not even make a beginning of doing good, another way for those who begin but never bring anything to its conclusion, one way for those who sin secretly and do good in public, another for those who hide the good they do and yet allow themselves to acquire a bad reputation for one or two things they have done.

The preacher becomes purveyor of knowledge and assessor of its recipient, i.e. his audience. He gets to judge their quality and to decide on the appropriate preaching for them. Thus, the categorization of preaching equates with

the categorization of persons. And the categories cover a broad and unwieldy spectrum of gender, age, social class, emotional disposition, political stature, and a wide array of moral postures and distinctions. The preacher should then possess the know-how of preaching as well as its “know-to-whom.”

So the kinds of listeners make for the fitness of what is said. “There is one manner of speaking proper to a man of little authority, and another which is proper to a man of great authority.” And the quality of the preaching takes after the quality of the listeners.

Then, it is necessary to speak crudely with uneducated people and more subtly with more clever people, boldly in the presence of tyrants, cautiously and reverently in the presence of truly great and good men; sometimes one should speak with spiritual enthusiasm, sometimes with prudent reserve, now in an encouraging way in the presence of the timid, now in a discouraging way in the presence of the presumptuous...

Thus we have a real *scientia praedicantis*, the knowledge of preaching and the knowledge for preaching, preaching as body of knowledge, generated and gathered, transmitted and taught.

### Michel Foucault on the Discourse of Power/Knowledge

A critical perusal of the text above reveals traces of what Michel Foucault variably called, “discursive formations,” “institutional practices,” “regimes of truth,” or quite simply “discourse.” The term is not unique to Foucault; however, its contemporary usage has much to owe to the French philosopher.

“**Discourse**” is a term re-appropriated and rehabilitated from the heydays of the ancient Greek Sophists. It was linked to truth of the practical kind, a truth that was told to people to move them into action, truth that made a concrete and pragmatic difference in human life. It was truth exercised and not merely contemplated. But such “discourse” got discredited, denounced as artificial, and had “truth” disengaged from its grasp and enshrined in the metaphysics of Western philosophy.

With the sixth century Greek poets, true discourse—in the meaningful sense—inspiring respect and submit, terror, to which all were obliged to because it held sway over all and was pronounced by men who spoke as of right, according to ritual, meted out justice and

attributed to each his rightful state; it prophesied the future, not merely announcing what was going to occur, but contributing to its actual event, carrying men along with it and thus weaving itself into the fabric of fate. And yet, a century later, the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was, nor in what it did: it lay in what was said. The day dawned when truth moved over from the ritualized act—potent and just—of enunciation its to settle on what was enunciated itself: meaning, its form, its object and its relation to what it referred to. A division emerged between Hesiod and Plato, separating true discourse from false; it was a new division for, henceforth, true discourse was no longer considered precious and desirable, since it has ceased to be discourse the linked to the exercise of power. And so the Sophists were routed. (Foucault *The Discourse on Language* 218)

“Discourse” is about knowledge, its process and its product, including the ways of its constitution and practice. Thus, preaching is “discourse,” involving the adequation of a body of truths, and its consequent application.

But “discourse” does not only refer to the **act and assemblage of knowledge**, but also primordially to the invention, assertion and propagation of its truths, to the conditions of its emergence, persistence and perpetuation. “Discourse” produces and is produced. And its “truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the distribution, circulation and production, regulation, operation of statements” (Foucault *Truth and Power* 133). Such statements are “the atoms of discourse,” distinguishable from the proposition’ of logicians, the ‘sentence’ of grammarians, the ‘speech act’ of analytic or structuralist philosophers (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 80). Statements are functions and enunciations of “discourse.” Statements have “truth-value” assigned to them, by “discourse,” through “discourse.”

## Preaching as Discourse

The treatise “On the Formation of Preachers,” churned out such statements as:

“(Preaching as) a job which is apostolic, angelic and divine must indeed be outstanding!” (II, 2)

“The full measure of the glory of heaven will not be reached without preaching.” (III, 6)

“Without preaching, the whole world would be in darkness, everything would be choked by the abundance of wickedness, a most dangerous famine would prevail universally, a

plague of disease would bring countless men to their death, cities would become desolate, the lack of the water of saving wisdom would lead to an unbearable drought, and no one on earth would be able to identify the ways that lead to salvation.” (III, 13)

These come across as almost arguing for its self, insisting on itself, extolling itself. The Discourse constructs discourse. The discourse discusses itself—why it is, what it is, how it is. Preaching proclaims preaching, pronounces its own reason for being. It announces the text of its truth and the truth of its text, as well as the context of its acceptance and circulation. And the knowledge it proffers is not some extracted essence, nor some elemental form of being, nor some snug dose of meaning, but a **mode of power**.

“It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together.” (Foucault *The History of Sexuality* 100)

Knowledge is power; Power is knowledge.

The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power... Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (Foucault *Prison Talk* 52)

So the knowledge of preaching endows one with the power of preaching. With the knowledge of truths and craft, the preacher is empowered to dispense and proclaim such saving wisdom to a sinful world.

But Foucault made the equation “discourse knowledge/power” turned on its underside: “power/knowledge discourse.” The “discourse” of preaching does not only make for the knowledge and the power of preaching. It also makes for the preaching of power, of a “will to knowledge”, a “will to truth.”

“There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which... lead one to consider forms of domination” (Foucault *Questions on Geography* 52).

Preaching seen as discourse of knowledge/power constructs its truths as it constructs itself as its own indispensable dispenser. It is “linked in a

circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. **A regime of truth** (Foucault *Truth and Power* 133).

This “discourse of power/knowledge” is constituted socially, “through relations established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization... (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 45)“

In former times, *sacra predicationis* referred both to the act of preaching and the community of preachers that pronounces it. Society produces preaching, its versions of truth, its methods and measures. In turn, preaching affirms the society, which espouses it. It is a society eminently called Christian.

Foucault characterized discursive practice three-fold manner: “the delimitation of a field of objects; the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge; and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (Foucault *History of Systems of Thought* 199).

## The Object of Preaching

The discourse of preaching defines its field of objects as the Word as Divine and the word as human, corresponding to real things in nature and super-nature. Yet it is not confined to these. It “creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulate new bodies of information” (Foucault *Prison Talk* 51). Preaching’s repertoire, once confined to grace, now expands to include academic competence, communicative expertise, moral stature, secular influence; aesthetic taste and cultural refinement, criticism-at large, the deployment of the means of social communication (mass media), etc. Thus, it is not so much its objects which define preaching but preaching which generates its objects as functions of its enduring discourse. Preaching invents the things it talks about.

## The Subject/Agent of Preaching

Next to be considered is its agent of knowledge. The preacher as agent of discourse ascends the pulpit as proclaimer and presider, certainly educated (in philosophy and theology), endowed (through a laying on of consecrated and consecrating hands) with a juridico-legal, institutional status, authorized

to preach, by and on behalf of God and his church. He earns the right to speak and be heard, to be accorded the best and central seat in the church, to be served and revered.

But the preacher is not an “individual,” not the unitary source of the preaching utterance nor the authority of its meaning. “The individual is not a pre-given entity... [but] the product of a relation of power... (Foucault *Questions on Geography* 74)” so, too, the individual preacher is a function of discourse, “an effect of power... the element of its articulation” (Foucault *Two Lectures* 98). Thus, the discourse of preaching “is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject” (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 55).

The preaching discourse does not originate nor consummate with “Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP”, nor “Bro. Mike Velarde”, nor “Cardinal Sin.” Such nomenclatures are mere accidents of discourse, “vehicles of (its) power.” Preaching invented “Ramirez”, “Velarde”, and “Sin.” It allowed them to emerge and to take on specific and sanctioned and sanctified forms.

The power of discourse “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives...” (Foucault *Prison Talk* 39). So the preacher is only what the discourse has made him, his formation, his ascendance through the hierarchy, his career development, his media enhancement and manipulation, and his signature gestures and emblems (ecclesiastical garb and regalia, religious habit, loud-colored suits, clichés, symbols, modulated voices, artsy gimmickry, etc.). Preaching invents the preacher.

### The Norms of Preaching

Thirdly, the norms of preaching apply to the formation of concepts and strategies. “Norm” refers to rule, standard, measure, some ground of arrangement and agreement. On the one hand, norms define discourse, determine and delimit it. On the other hand, discourse decides on its norms, plays upon the “prescriptions that designate its exclusions and choices” (Foucault *History of Systems of Thought* 199). Thus, the discourse of preaching can be seen as entailing norms for **its conceptual formations**, some apparatus of conventions for defining, comparing, contrasting, connecting, dividing, expanding, reducing, verifying and falsifying its ideas and concepts. This refers to “a set

of rules for arranging statements in series, an obligatory set of schemata of dependence, of order, and of successions, in which the recurrent elements that may have value as concepts were distributed" (Foucault 57), covering and constituting "rules of formal construction, others rhetorical practices; internal configuration of a text" (Foucault 57-59).

The discourse of preaching must employ only those words and themes and department, which are deemed, appropriate within the sphere of sacred eloquence. Thus, a sermon must still be encumbered by a lingering cultural bias in its supposedly serious and admonishing language. Thus, we have the ecclesiastical discipline of Homiletics, which necessarily shares the same seed-bed (*seminarium*) with Dogmatics (what is to be believed), Scriptures (what God said), Morals (what must be done), Sacraments and Liturgy (how must worship be), Church History (how these began), Canon Law (what is allowed), etc., as academic requirements for ordained clerical preaching. Thus, there are the so-called "sources of faith and theology." Thus, there are creedal statements and anathema sit, which found and fix divine revelation. Thus, there are textbooks, *summa theologiae*, compendia, encyclicals, exhortations, general instructions, rubrics, rites, canons, etc., which prescribe and describe ecclesiastical manner and method. Thus, there are constitutions and ordinations, directories, acts and statutes, which legislate life and discipline. Thus, there is the treatise "On the Formation of Preachers." Thus, there are *ars praedicandi*, *florilegium*, *legenda*, *lives of the saints*, martyrology, litanies, mysteries, formularies, iconographies, etc., which foster devotion and fund resources for preaching. Thus, there is an entire conceptual/pre-conceptual field, a context and complex of rules which engenders preaching, and which preaching begets. **Preaching invents the norms of preaching itself.**

### The Discipline of Preaching

The norms moreover link up with strategies, themes and theories which may seem to account for the coherence of discourse. Describing these strategies would include its points and means of application in society, its effects, its modes of training, implementation, enforcement, and its **disciplines**.

Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques,



procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a physics or an anatomy of power, technology. (Foucault 215)

At the physical level, the disciplines bear discourse. These define not the law, but the norm. Through a complex artifice of identification, observation, judgment, analysis, examination, the setting up of hierarchies through installations and ordinations, physical control, temporal management, regulation, legal procedures, restrictions and sanctions, etc., disciples are formed, individuals engineered, citizens educated, discourse perpetuated.

The discourse of preaching demands a discipline – the deployment of strategies of social control and configuration, appellation and interpellation. Preaching “polices” people—the preacher as well as the faithful. Preaching “polices” preaching itself—allows it, tolerates it, moderates it, adjudicates it, castigates it, forbids it. Thus, there is seminary formation (as controlled space and time), professions, tribunals, *coetus professorum, de moribus, ordo missae*, solemn liturgical department, chapter of faults, CBCP pastoral letters and admonitions, etc. **Preaching invents the discipline by which and through which it orders itself.**

By way of summary, this chapter first posited the specific constitution of preaching as an act and body of knowledge, exemplified in Humbert of Romans’ *On the Formation of Preachers*. This monumental opus founded the causes and reasons, argued for the pre-eminence and excellence, defined and described in excruciating details the manners and methods, the meat and mettle of the sacred art of preaching.

Then, Michel Foucault was introduced into the discussion, specifically through his critical equation of discourse and power/knowledge. On several points, the chapter discussed preaching as discourse,” by describing and re-considering preaching not only in terms of its traditional and conservative definition as an intelligent, benevolent, supernatural-natural communication, but as a specific discursive practice, feigning rationality and objectivity, to conceal and reveal its ideological agenda (See Figure 1).

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Accordingly, preaching involves knowing—the word of God and the word of man, representing things as they are or as they should be. But to see preaching as discourse reveals the contraction and construction of a body of knowledge and knowers. It constitutes and institutes its own truths, which refer not merely, nor really to things transcendent, but to itself.

Preaching entails the presence of a power – infused and/or cultivated—which provides the sufficient reason for its being and meaning. But the discourse of preaching installs powers and authorities, and is, in turn, installed by them for the grounding: generating, guarding, and guaranteeing of its regime.

One is thought to be formed into preaching through a careful submission to prescribed order. But the reconsideration of preaching as discourse unmasks the ordering of this order, in the mechanisms and technologies of its application—the whole praxis of preaching.

In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as function of the true discourses, which as the bearers of the specific effects of power. (Foucault 94)

The discourse of preaching is verily about the formation of the preacher. But by a critical and playful inversion, the preacher and his preaching are verily about the formation of its own discourse. **The discourse of preaching is the preaching of discourse.**

*“Wanting to be teachers of the law, they understand neither what they are saying nor the things, which they speak so dogmatically about.”*

(1 Timothy 1:7)

Table 1. Preaching as Discourse of Knowledge and as Discourse of Power

	<b>Preaching in Traditional Discourse</b>	<b>Preaching in Foucault's Discourse</b>
<b>Object</b>	Word of God ( <i>Dei Verbum</i> ): Word of Man ( <i>Verbum Humanum</i> )	Academic/scholarly competence Communicative expertise Moral stature Secular influence Aesthetic taste Cultural sophistication Criticism-at-large
<b>Subject-Agent</b>	God as Final Cause: Preacher as Instrumental Cause	"His Holiness" "His Eminence" "His Excellency" "Reverend" "Father" "Brother"
<b>Norms of Concept Formation</b>	Sources of Theology: Sacred Scriptures	Dogma Morals Liturgy and Sacraments Exegesis Canon Law
<b>Strategies-Disciplines</b>	Commandments Precepts	Tribunals Ecumenical Councils Encyclicals Pastoral Letters
	<b>The Discourse of Preaching is for the Salvation of Souls</b>	<b>The Discourse of Preaching is the Preaching of (its own) Discourse</b>

# Reading the Text of Preaching

*"Sometimes our Holy Father Dominic was also seen praying with his hands and arms spread out like a cross, stretching himself to the limit and standing as upright as he possibly could."*

(The Sixth Way of Prayer, from  
"The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic", 98.)

It stands high up there in the main sanctuary of the church, with all the lines, from aisles to eaves, from pillars to pews, from rays of light to beams of concrete, ushering sight and silence to its central attention. In reverential approach, one comes upon a larger-than-life mosaic portrait of a man transfixed as in a crucifix. Yet he is fastened not to a wooden cross; instead, there is an almost ethereal and numinous background. It is not the portrait of heroic agony, but of heavenly ecstasy; not of naked debasement, but of black-and-white solemnity. It fixes its gaze all over, painted in such a way that as one looks at it from anywhere in the church below, the image appears to look at all, from above the main altar. With arms and hands outstretched, the man holds a book in his left and beads in his right. Down beside him is a dog, furred in black and white, with a lighted torch in its mouth, and standing solidly on a globe. It is the picture of **Domingo de Guzman** (c. 1170-1221), founder of the Order of Preachers.

One can read in (to) it a double analogy: Of Santo Domingo, the patronal saint, and of Jesus, cross-fixed signature of every Christian church. Traditional theology can live with such explanation as adequate

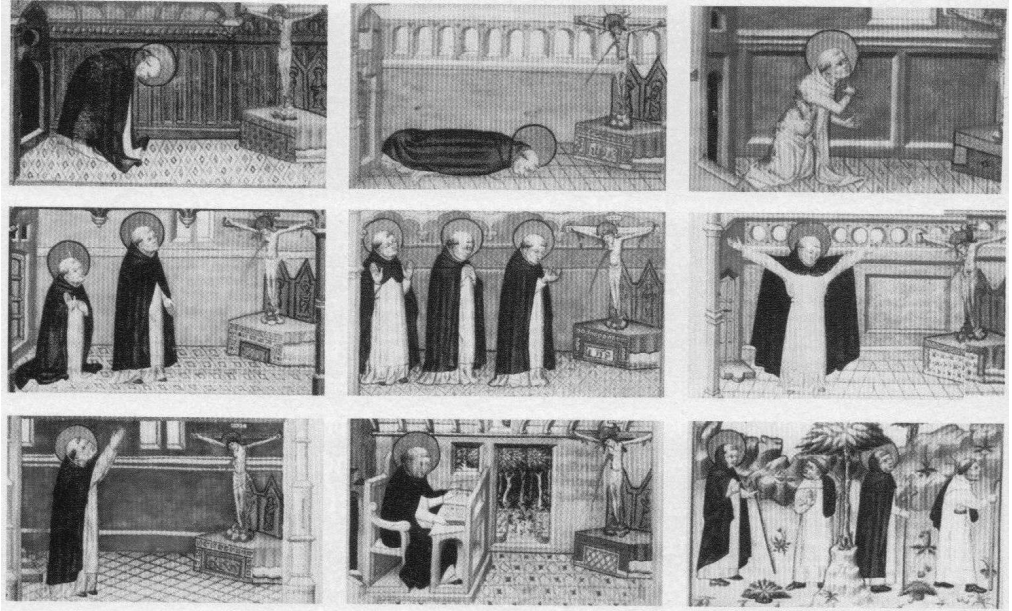


Fig. 3 "Nine Ways of Prayer" of St Dominic; medieval tradition

and appropriate: The canonized and exemplary imitation by the blessed ones, of the saving passion of the Lord. It thus fulfills its sacramental function of affirming its sensible materiality (of bits of glass in mosaic configuration) and pointing to its spiritual reality (of Dominic's cross-figuration of Christ), things other-than-itself, and realms holier-and-higher-than-itself.

Thus, in this context, within the confines of this church, according to its discourse, Dominic is a metaphor of Christ and by way of extension, all those who follow the rules of his order, who don his religious habit, who administer to his church, all Dominicans are metaphors of Dominic, and, therefore, of Christ. *Alter Dominicus, Alter Christus.*



Fig.4 Mosaic of Santo Domingo de Guzman, founder of the Order of Preachers (DOMINICANS); located at the main altar of Santo Domingo Church, Quezon City, Philippines

Such reading of sacred signification fits well in the larger and graver discourse of Christianity, with its sacramental slant, for revealing and reading the *imago Dei*, the likeness of the Creator in creatures, of earth as mirror of heaven. Thus, the order of representation manifests a representation of order: Image to thing, sign to signified, creation to Creator, humankind to God.

But the signification is always already over-determined. It says one thing, and means another... and another, and another. *Significans ad infinitum*. One is then invited **to creatively read more** and **to critically read against** the texts at hand, to push sacramental sign further, to defer its singular fixation and dictation.

This section sets out to ask: **How is preaching to be read?** It hopes to establish the readability of preaching by determining the textuality, the “text-ness” of preaching, drawing the perimeters and parameters of the preaching discourse as instantiated by preaching, specifically communicated and preserved using the (mass) media of social communication, and produced for local television.

More concretely, it shall attempt a formal reading of preaching, an internal criticism of a televised preaching of Fr. Erasmo “Sonny” Ramirez, OP, recorded on VHS cassette tape, retrieved and reviewed, transcribed and textured for this study.

Lay people have often spoken of Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP as “*yung paring magaling magsermon*” (“that priest who preaches sermons well”). This specialization in sermons actually refers to a species of preaching, i.e. liturgical preaching, that has been the touchstone of Fr. Sonny Ramirez’ famed eloquence.

For this reason, his homily for the Eucharist celebrated last October 12, 1997, televised live from Sto. Domingo Church, Quezon City, shall be considered as the main context for this study. The occasion for preaching was *La Naval de Manila*, the Solemn Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, whose miraculous image is kept as principal possession and promoted as a prime ministry by the Dominicans in the Philippines. The homily for the seven o’clock mass, that Sunday morning, a service ordinarily and regularly attended by an urbanized, media-informed lower class to middle class lay faithful. Being a feast day of the city and country, several persons of note from politics to show business were also in the audience.



Fig.5 Fr. Erasmo "Sonny" Ramirez, OP, Filipino Dominican and pioneer of Catholic preaching on TV (1980's)

The text for criticism is taken from an audio-visual recording of the event, meagerly edited and made for television. It was on VHS cassette, graciously made available by the staff of "Sharing," Fr. Ramirez' long-running religious program on television. From the oral performance and delivery of the homily, a *verbatim* transcription was drawn, which, unfortunately failed to capture specifically visual elements – shots and angles, close-up, panning, etc. and distinctly auditory units – voice modulation, phrasing, pauses, rhetorical rhythm, etc., found in the preaching text. Thus, what is read is the post-performance scribal rendition of Fr. Ramirez' popular preaching.

### A Socio-Rhetorical Critical Reading

The discussion in this section begins with a problematic of reading. The question "How is reading?" probes not only into the problems found by and through the act of reading, but also into the reading of reading itself, the presuppositions, procession and production of reading, its relations to thought/knowledge, to meaning, to language, to nature to society, to the



bits and pieces and, ultimately, to the whole complex known as human life. And it invites answers all over, from the philosophical to the literary, from the traditional to the revolutionary, from the classic to the romantic, from the modern to the postmodern, from the gendered to the colored, from gay to queer, from the simplistic to the psychoanalytic, from the bourgeois to the proletarian, from occidental to oriental, (from Dominican to Jesuit), from the prescriptive to the deconstructive, from reading to reading, reading against reading, theory upon theory versus theory of the surplus value of reading. This phenomenon of fecund pluriformity confounds the mind, but chastens its (super) vision, emasculating its absolutist manias and objectivist conjectures, making it hurtfully and honestly human. Now, one is left, not without a choice, but with a galaxy of options in reading and its rendering, ensembles and repertoires, forms, tools and strategies, approaches and practices, theoretical constructs, and critical insights, for breaking up, breaking down, breaking apart, breaking away, and breaking through the textual mass.

This study has decided to employ the **socio-rhetorical approach to criticism**. The term “**socio-rhetorical**” was used by the English professor of religion, Vernon Robbins, to describe his strategy/strategies of reading biblical texts, “to produce a richly textured and deeply reconfigured interpretation” (3). Its primary metaphor is that of **text as tapestry**, as a thick web and weaving a network, an enmeshing of “meanings and meaning effects that humans create” (3). And reading is a matter of unweaving the fibers and layers and lines of the text.

Its point of order, however, is a **theory of rhetoric**, built around the human artifice that is **language**. Language says it all, and it says more. Rhetoric is the practice and science of saying, about “the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects” (Eagleton 205). So, all human acts of symbolizing and communicating are set in a rhetorical context, one which recognizes both oral and written language, as interactive and constitutive of interests and effects in particular society.

Socio-rhetorical reading then employs multiple strategies for collation, description, evaluation, and interpretation, which are non-exclusive, but affirmative, collaborative, but nonetheless, critical of the insights provided and gained by literary critics, linguists, sociolinguists, anthropologists, philosophers, etc. This model:

1. “presents a ‘system’ approach to interpretation”;
2. “uses a strategy of reading and re-reading a text from different angles to produce a ‘revalued’ or ‘revisited’ rhetorical interpretation...that is explicitly interdisciplinary”;
3. “uses the same strategies of analysis on other people’s interpretations of the text under consideration as strategies for analyzing the...text itself” (Robbins 40-41).
4. This socio-rhetorical approach moves through a four-arena program dealing with **inner texture, the intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture**. This chapter is confined to the inner texture, which corresponds to the formalist, textualist project of reading and criticism.

### A Formal Reading of the Inner Texture

Reading begins from within. “Inner Texture concerns relationships among word-phase and narrational patterns that produce argumentative and aesthetic patterns in text” (Robbins 46).

The crucial word is in the preposition “**in**” which stands in contrast to “out.” It basically assumes then that a text has something “in” it, as much as it has something “outside” of it. What is “in” it are words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, etc. – lines of thought spelled in lines of language. What is “in” it makes up for the ordering of the text, its distinct arrangement into some pattern of sense and significance. And the reading of what is “in” it, roughly corresponds to the formalist project of detecting a text’s inner logic, and eventually, its “literariness,” what makes the text as such.

But what is at hand is not an originally written text, but preaching as oral performance, and indeed, preaching as audio-visual performance. It was first seen and heard before written down and read in the manner set out in this study. Its *post-factum* transcription entailed several editorial decisions, e.g. whether to transcribe it as prose or as free lines, to designate several lines as forming a paragraph unit, etc., which are not definitive, but, at best, strategic.

The pre-text for the preaching is the Gospel as proclaimed in the televised liturgy. It is from the account of **Luke 1:39-56**: the narrative of the **Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth**, and the occasion for the **Magnificat**, Mary’s hymn of praise to God.

## Opening-Middle-Closing Texture

It was Aristotle who prescribed the determination of a **beginning, middle, and ending** for the action depicted in a story. This scheme makes for the wholeness, i.e. integrity of a text, and its logical relation to its parts. It identifies the span and section of a unit of discourse. In this study of preaching as a rhetorical unit, “the goal is to discern the persuasive effect of the parts, how they work together in relation to the persuasive nature of the entire text” (Robbins 50-51).

The initial task in reading the inner texture is to break down the text into several units, which have been deemed to form some coherent thought. The numbering and subsequent descriptive category shall henceforth serve as identifying marks of the units.

#1: How can a fourteen year old girl... young lady, speak of this kind, of making this beautiful poetry, of this prayer, of this praise to the Lord? It must be the wisdom of God in her.”

#2: Nang minsan, mayroon akong ginawa sa Tulungan Center namin...

Isang bata na mayroong bakukang, ulcers at mayroon nang gumagalaw na kung anu-anong parasites... mayroon siyang kurikong... hindi na yata maganda ang ayos, ang amoy...

Eh, ginagamot ko to... hinahawakan ko yung kanyang sugat...

May isang observer mula sa isang private school, at sabi niya, “Alam mo, Father hindi ko gagawin ‘yang ginagawa mo, kahit bayaran ako ng isang milyong piso.”

Tiningnan ko siya at sabi ko sa kanya, “Ako rin... hindi ko rin gagawin ito... ba, kahit na isang milyong piso pa ang babayaran mo sa akin...”

#3: Ano ibig kong sabihin, may mga bagay-bagay na nagagawa ka, nang hindi dahil sa pera, o dahil sa mundo...

May nagagawa ka, dahil sa may kaunting karunungan na ipinahid sa iyo ang Panginoon.

Ang karunungang ito ang nagdadala sa atin patungo sa kalangitan.

**#4:** Si Maria ay tinawag na “Upuan ng Karunungan,” “Seat of Wisdom.”

Upuan siya ng karunungan, dahil nananahan sa kanyang tiyan ang Diyos at ang Diyos ay Karunungan.

Jesus is Wisdom.

**#5:** At nakikita po natin sa buhay natin, na ang karunungan iyan ay hindi yata nagagamit ng karaniwang tao ngayon, kahit na yung mga taong marurunong o edukado.

Masyado tayong nalulumon sa science, sa computers, sa technology na nakakalimutan na natin ‘yung plain, simple wisdom, coming from the Lord.

**#6:** Ano ang karunungan ito? Ang karunungan ito ang nagsasabi sa iyo, “Makinig ka sa Panginoon, sa kagustuhan Niya at ikaw ay nasa tamang daan.

Huwag mong pabayaang na ang iyong emotions, yung mga feelings mo, yung gusto mo ang masunod... Huwag mong pabayaang na ang mundo ang magdikta sa iyo kung ano ka? ano kailangan mo? at ano ang kailangan ng alam mo?

Dahil kapag ganyan ang nangyari sa iyo, TALO KA!”

**#7:** Masdan mo ang ating Birhen... de La Naval.

Hindi naman siya ganyan, at hindi naman ganyang ang suot niya noong nabubuhay siya... She’s a plain woman. Kung aalisin mo ang damit niya na magaganda ngayon... pareho pa rin siya. Siya pa rin ang Birhen ng Fatima, ang Birhen ng Lourdes, ang Birhen ng Medjugorie, ang Birhen ng La Salette... all in common, ordinary wardrobe.

Ang lahat ng ito...lahat ng kanyang damit... lahat ng kanyang palamuti... lahat ng jewelries niya ay bigay sa kanya ng kanyang mga deboto... Tayong lahat. We are the ones who make her such—Queen in our appearance. Why? We want her to be queen.

Pero, madaling magbigay ng alahas, eh... madaling magbigay ng pera, madali yan. Pero ang nasa loob ng estatwang ito, ang nasa loob ng pagkatao ni Maria.

This is the one that makes her distinctive from all of us. She would follow the wisdom of God, all the time.

**#8:** Sino ang mga taong ayaw sumunod sa karunungan ng Diyos?

ITO YUNG MGA TANGA! ITO YUNG MGA GAGO! ITO YUNG MGA HUNGHANG!  
They are the foolish ones.

At marami sa atin, kasama doon sa mga descriptions na yon.

Alam nyo po ba kung bakit?

Kasi mas importante sa atin ang makapasa sa eskuwela para magkaroon ng tinatawag nating career.

Bakit?

Kasi gusto natin ma-assure ang ating futuro.

Bakit?

Kasi mahirap kung wala kang pera. Bakit?

Kasi ayokong mamatay sa gutom. Bakit?

Kasi, mas importante sa akin ang aking katawan, rather than my soul..

**#9:** Ang karunungan ang nagsasabi na mas importante ang kaluluwa kaysa sa katawan, Kaya sinasabi ng Panginoon, “Iyong gusto ko ang sundin mo, at ikaw ay may karunungan.”

**#10:** Pero, ayaw natin ito. Ibig natin makiisa sa mundo. We’re influenced by the world. And we make ourselves slaves of the world, we’re prisoners of the values, and the wants, and the desires of the world.

You can pursue your happiness... DEFINITELY.

**#11:** But in pursuing one’s happiness, one cannot see happiness in dealing with money, with the things of this world, and with the pleasure of the world.

No! One can be happy when one has a sense of accomplishment. “Nagawa ko ito. Hindi mag-isa, kundi kasama ang Panginoon.”

“My soul, my being glorifies the greatness of the lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my savoir, for he has looked upon his servant in lowliness.”

Ano ang sinasabi ni Maria? “Kung ako man ay may espesyal na papel, ‘Salamat, Panginoon!’ Pagpapakumbabang sinabi kong, “Lahat ay nanggagaling sa Diyos. Walang nanggagaling sa akin. Lahat ay sa Kanya!”

**#12:** Ngunit tayong mga tao ngayon, kung umurong tayo, kung gumalaw tayo—akala mo—tayo rin ang gumagawa ng ating bukas. We design our own tomorrow, and God doesn’t have even a plan or a chance to plan our lives.

Iyon ang mga hunghang! These are the foolish people who will say, “I don’t need God. I only need God when I am in extreme fear, in extreme pressure. I need the world and the world is just passing. I must live my life, living in this world with only one aim: to be happy. Period!

Kahit mali ang aking kaligayahan, okey lang.

‘Yon ang kaligayahan ng mga durugista, ‘Yon ang kaligayahan ng mga taong gumagamit ng violence, dahas para magkaroon ng lakas, magkaroon ng awtoridad, magkaron ng poder. ‘Yon—‘yon ang tinatawag nating gawain ng mga hunghang.

**#13:** Ano ang karunungan, Una, wisdom would always let God’s truth to emerge, and we wait for that emergence.

“Bayaan mong pumaimbulog ang katotohanan. masaktan ka ngayon, mahirapan ka ngayon, kung lahat ng ito’y nakikita ng Panginoon at NANINIWALA KA at nagtitiwala ka na alam ng Panginoon ang lahat ng nangyayari, hindi ka niya pababayaan. Lalabas at lalabas ang tunay na ganda ng buhay at ng katotohanan.

**#14:** Naiintindihan ba ni Maria when that angel came to her and to announce that she would become the Mother of God? No!

Naiintindihan ba niya nang nawala si Hesus? Hindi!

Naiintindihan ba niya nang sinabi ni Hesus doon sa wedding sa Cana? Hindi rin!

Naiintindihan ba niya –Panginoon –na ang kanyang anak ay kailangan ipako sa krus at nakita niya na ang anak niya—ay unti-unting namamatay sa harap niya, sa krus ng Kalbaryo? Hindi!

But everything...she kept in her heart, Meaning... “Malalaman ko ang lahat sa kabuuhan [kung] bakit ito nangyayari.”

**#15:** “Wait! Maghintay kang kagaya ni Maria. Wait. Suffer a little now. Suffer a little.. for God has a greater design in our lives. Huwag kang matakot mahirapan... masaktan paminsan-minsan. Mabuti iyan sa katawan. Mabuting lumuha ka paminsan-minsan, para ang mga mata mo naman ay magkaroon ng kaunting... paglilinis.”

**#16:** The second point and factor of wisdom...Wisdom tells us to express the reality of truth in practicing love or charity among our people.

Kung ang lahat ng nalalaman natin ay naririto lang... at laging pinapaumbok lang natin dito... ay hindi natin nilalabas at pinapakita sa pag-ibig sa mga taong nangangailangan ng pag-ibig... then, wisdom is not at all, true and whole.

Wisdom tells us “Go to the people... who need you. Reach out to the people who need you.”

**#17:** “Look at Mary. Ano ang ginagawa niya nang kailanganin siya ng kanyang pinsang si Elisabet? Umalis siya na kahit siya’y buntis...kahit na hirap na hirap siya, she went up the hill country of Ain Karim, and helped her cousin Elizabeth to give birth.

Nang Nakita niya na si Hesus ay naghihirap sa krus...iniwan ba niya? Hindi! She practiced charity. Nasa paanan siya ng krus at sinasabi niya sa kanyang anak, “Dalawa tayong maghihirap. Pati ako nagdurusa. Pati ako namamatay para sa iyo, Anak.”

**#18:** Walang karunungan hanggang hindi ito naipapakita sa pag-ibig, sa pagpapatawad at sa pag-uunawa.

Walang karunungan kung hindi tayo magpapakumbaba at sinasabi nating, “Ako ay nilalang lamang at ang Panginoon ang aking Diyos.”

#19: Iyan ang ginagawa ng babaeng ito. Iyan ang ginagawa ni Mariang ating ina... isang ina na laging nagsasabi sa atin, “Gamitin mo ang karunungan na binigay ng Panginoon sa iyo.” Hindi mo ito maaaring malaman sa eskwela. You will never learn this from school, but there is wisdom in each and every one of us.—the jewel—the gem that has to be discovered. We can only discover this, if we have the guts to follow Mary... Doing the will of God and saying Yes, Oh Yes... kahit ano ang mangyari, Yes pa rin. Kahit na mahirap, Yes, Lord... Your will be done.”

#20: Hindi siya Diyos; Ina siya ng Diyos. Hindi siya ang Karunungan; Upuan siya ng Karunungan.

#21: “What stops you to follow me and her?” She is just an ordinary woman, an ordinary person... who succeeded in life and went to heaven... because of wisdom. ‘Yon ang hamon ko sa bawat isa sa atin ngayon: ‘Pag nagdarasal ka ng rosary, magpakumbaba kang humingi ng karunungan sa Panginoon. At ‘yan ang ibibigay sa iyo... gaya ni Marian gating Ina. Mabuhay si Maria!’

Unit #1 as the **opening texture** launches the homily with a question which could be reduced to “How was Mary able to sing the *Magnificat*?” The preacher himself provides the answer and the core issue of preaching: The wisdom of God in Mary.

Unit #21 poses another question which could be seen as the **closure of the text**. However, true conclusion begins with Unit #20, with the re-assertion of the all-too-familiar “Mary is Seat of Wisdom.” The questions and assertions in the said units, though not the only questions and assertions in the text, can be considered as the frame for the homily. The first question is answered by the explicit statement: Wisdom (of God) is found in Mary. The last question, however, has the unstated answer: Wisdom of (God) can also be found in us (if we follow Mary’s example).

The rest of the text (**the middle texture**) proves to be a muddled assemblage of categories and trains of thought, harping on the supposed theme, fleshing it out further, thickening its plot and tightening its knot, raising its level of action, alternately complicating and extenuating.



Unit #2, the personal anecdote (in Filipino), long proven to be an effective device in public speaking, is an easily recognizable unit.

Unit #3: is the statement of the moral of the anecdote.

Unit #4 reiterates the thesis: Wisdom of God is in Mary, by linking it to one of her traditional titles: Mary is Seat of Wisdom (*Sedis Sapientiae*). These three units can be considered as part of the opening segment.

Unit #5 is a *via negative* localization of wisdom, i.e. it is not found in the modern world. This is the true beginning of the middle texture.

Unit #6 links Wisdom to Obedience to God.

Unit #7 cites Mary as an example of this wisdom-as-obedience-to-God which made her what she is now: Queen of heaven and earth.

Unit # 8 serves as a counterpoint by aligning a short but forceful roll call of those without this wisdom, because they disobey God. The serialization of questions and answers, through the formula “**Bakit? Kasi...** [Why? Because...]” builds up an argument that supposedly delves into the reasons for the disobedience of “these foolish ones.” The unit concludes with the pronouncement that the roots of foolishness is preference for the material vis-á-vis the spiritual.

In Unit #9, Wisdom is made to tell us that the spiritual is actually the more important side of the binary.

Unit #10 presents our generation’s mistaken and misguided preference for the material as the key to happiness.

Unit #11 retrieves happiness as preferring the spiritual, as recognizing our dependence in God. This unit includes a Biblical citation, which is then paraphrased in the vernacular. In the form of a direct address to the implied audience.

Unit #12 returns to the contrast: People of modern times prefer the absence of God/materialism. They are then identified with earlier motif of foolishness ones, who prefer an ungodly, fleeting, abusive happiness.

Unit #13 is a descriptive remark about wisdom: It is being patient for God, for the emergence of his truth and his will.

Unit #14 again takes up Mary as an example for this heroic patience, presented in a series of rhetorical questions about Biblical episodes in Mary’s life. Mary is wise because she waited, through lack of understanding and physical suffering, for the full revelation of God.

Unit #15 shifts back to the audience, to make an exhortation: “Suffer like Mary.”

Unit #16 resumes the description of wisdom: It is also related to acts of charity.

Unit #17 again uses episodes from Mary’s life to amplify the wisdom-as-charity thesis.

Unit #18 relates the **wisdom-as-obedience-as-patient-endurance-as-charity** thesis, through a pair of double negatives “*Walang hanggang/kung hindi...*” (There would be no... unless...)

Unit #19 summarizes the exemplar provided by Mary and her admonition: “Be wise in the Lord, but not in the world; Imitate her in obedience and patience.”

Unit #20 re-presents the thesis: “Mary is the Seat of Wisdom.”

Unit #21 is a concluding question addressed to us, pointing to the (implied) assertion that “The Wisdom of God can also be found in us (if we follow Mary).” An interjection extolling Mary tapers off the homily.

### Repetitive-Progressive Texture

Non-western texts have often been characterized as replete with cyclical elements, with mantraic qualities, and “various kinds of restatement and sequence.” This internal feature foreground signs (visualized) and sounds (auditor-ized), which serves as threads which bind whatever thoughts and content are conveyed by the text.

The text at hand is replete with **repetitive features**. By a simple tabulation, certain words and concepts have been noted to recur throughout the document.

Table 2. Most Recurrent Words

Mary/Maria (proper nouns)	Pronoun (pertaining to her)	God/ Diyos/ Panginoon	Wisdom/ Karunungan
17 times	33 times	31 times	30 times

Unsurprisingly and overwhelmingly, the frequency of this term defines the dominant motif of this preaching: It is a homily about the revered Catholic doctrine on the Mary-Wisdom-God theme.

The text does not only manifest repetitions, but **serialization** as well. From simple lists to catenal lines, these features present a building up of thought.

“... Seat of Wisdom  
... Birhen de La Naval  
... Birhen ng Fatima  
... Birhen ng Medjugorje  
... Birhen ng La Salette  
... Mother of God...”

It is a litany of Mary’s titled manifestations and apparitions. This series confirms the “Mary” motif of the homily. She is one, yet she is many. The list names her variably, simultaneously as one and as other/s.

After the solemn comes the vulgar: a scathing roster of derogatory expletives, delivered in street-smart language, variations playing upon category of the unwise person.

Ito ‘yung mga tanga!  
Ito ‘yung mga gago!  
Ito ‘yung mga hunghang!  
These are the foolish ones!

Then comes a series, cadenced by the use of the formula “**Bakit? Kasi...**” (Why? Because...) which purportedly investigates the phenomena of the unwise.

Alam n’yo po ba kung bakit?  
Kasi mas importante sa atin ang makapasa  
Sa eskuwela para magkaroon ng tinatawag nating career. Bakit?  
Kasi gusto natin ma-assure ang ating future. Bakit?  
Kasi mahirap kung wala kang pera. Bakit?  
Kasi ayokong matatay sa gutom. Bakit?  
Kasi, mas importante sa akin ang aking katawan, rather than my soul...

The form is casual, but its content is not. The concatenation of questions and answers are not logically warranted, but can be best described as “**doorway questions**,” with answers that only lead to further questions. The answers provided are probable, but too particular. So, what we have are not philosophical answers to the issues of the unwise, but context-specific musings, not at all generalizable. The final statement rounds up the series with assertion: “**to be unwise is to be materialistic.**” Through a linear logical form, the series conveys a certain development of thought, which is non-linear, at all. It invites facile assimilation of unwarranted causal relations and conclusions.

Then comes a **rhetorical procession of questions** posed and answered in the negative, by the preacher himself.

Naiintindihan ba ni Maria when that angel came to her and to announce that she would become the Mother of God? No!

Naiintindihan ba niya nang nawala si Hesus? Hindi!

Naiintindihan ba niya nang sinabi ni Hesus doon sa wedding sa Cana? Hindi rin!

Naiintindihan ba niya—Panginoon—na ang kanyang anak ay kailangan ipako sa krus at nakita niya na ang anak niya—ay unti-unting namamatay sa harap niya, sa krus ng Kalbaryo? Hindi!

A rhetorical question is one which begs no answer from its implied hearers; it is the speaker asking himself aloud, and answering himself aloud. And in this case, this rhetorical series plays upon the thesis of Wisdom-as-Obedience, citing Mary’s lack of understanding of events in her life, while, nonetheless, agreeing to undergo and endure them, even painfully.

### Narrative Texture

Building upon the opening-middle-closing, as well as the repetitive-sequential textures, narrational texture hopes to explore narrative feature in the preaching text. This scheme sees the **layers of narration as rhetorical devices**. Point-of-view and voice “that tells the story and speaks to the reader” are not mere categories of creative writing and critical reading; they are deliberate techniques of **persuasion** “to seduce and entangle the reader in its own view of the world” (Robbins 54-56).

One voice is obvious in the text: It is the preacher's deep, bass voice, physically heard and preserved, along with words and visuals. And even if the preacher is not seen on television, his voice persists, his elocution proceeds. His voice actually serves as the first principle of unity for the discourse: It ties his words and conveys his thoughts.

It is a studied voice, modulating pitch and tone, shifting from language to language, impressive in enunciation and pronunciation, harnessing tactical pauses, meaningful silences, laborious breathing, emotions-on-the-brink to bring about a deliberate and desired overall auditory impact.

It is a playful voice. At times, it speaks for the individual, as in the case of the personal anecdote; at other times, for more-than-the-individual, it speaks for us, speaks to us, speaks against us. And yes, it speaks of God, speaks to God, speaks as God.

The dynamics and distribution of this voice can be monitored by a tabulation of personal pronouns used in the homily, indicating the persons assumed and positions taken syntactically. **(Please see Table 2)**

There is a preponderance of the **first-person pronouns** in the anecdote (#2) and whenever there is an attempt to depict the present world in a negative light (#s 8, 10,12). The **second person pronouns** are used most often when asserting lessons and dramatic points, during moralizing moments (#s 6, 13, 15, 19, 21). The **third person** is used when referring to Mary, pointing to her, at the distance, as the positive contrast to our negative world (#s 7, 14, 17, 20).

The shifts in person then are not arbitrary, but indicative of the moral appraisal of persons mentioned in the preaching text, which can aptly be summarized as:

“WE (first person) are bad.  
SHE (third person) is good.  
YOU (second person) better follow her.”

Another distinct feature of the narrator's voice is the presence of 18 questions in the homily.

- (1) How can a fourteen year old girl... young lady, speak of this kind... of making this beautiful poetry... of this prayer... of this praise to the Lord?

- (2) Ano ang karununganang ito?
- (3) Why? (is the image of the Virgin so bejeweled and richly endowed)
- (4) Sino ang mga taong ayaw sumunod sa karunungan ng Diyos?
- (5) Alam nyo po ba kung bakit  
Kasi mas importante sa atin ang makapasa sa eskuwela para magkaroon ng tina-tawag nating career. (6) Bakit?  
Kasi gusto natin ma-assure ang ating futuro. (7) Bakit?  
Kasi mahirap kung wala kang pera. (8) Bakit?  
Kasi ayokong mamatay sa gutom. (9) Bakit?
- (10) Ano ang sinasabi ni Maria?
- (11) Ano ang karunungan?
- (12) Naiintindihan ba ni Maria when that angel came to her and to announce that she would become the Mother of God? No!
- (13) Naiintindihan ba niya nang nawala si Hesus? Hindi!
- (14) Naiintindihan ba niya nang sinabi ni Hesus doon sa wedding sa Cana? Hindi rin!
- (15) Naiintindihan ba niya—Panginoon—na ang kanyang anak ay kailangan ipako sa krus at nakita niya na ang anak niya—ay unti-unting namamatay sa harap niya, sa krus ng Kalbaryo? Hindi!
- (16) Ano ang ginagawa niya nang kailanganin siya ng kanyang pinsang si Elisabet?
- (17) Nang Nakita niya na si Hesus ay naghihirap sa krus, iniwan ba niya?
- (18) What stops you and me to follow her?

And the voice that questions is the voice that answers. Some of the questions are **pre-texts** for statements to be made (#s 1, 2, 4, 11); others are **rhetorical** in form, with too obvious answers (#s 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17), still others present a **logical sequence**, i.e. follow-up questions to answers to previous questions (#s 5, 6, 7, 8, 9); one is a **dramatic set-up for a direct address** (#10); and one question is left for the **audience to answer themselves** (#18). These are actually persuasive inventions, i.e. by the **force of interrogation**, by posing questions, the homily makes assertions in an emphatic way.

Next, there is the **form of direct address**, when the voice assumes another speaker: (18) What stops you and me to follow her?

Next, there is the **form of direct address**, when the voice assumes another speaker:

(as Wisdom personified) Ang karunungan ito ang nagsasabi sa iyo, “Makinig ka sa Panginoon, sa kagustuhan Niya at ikaw ay nasa tamang daan..”

(as God) Kaya sinasabi ng Panginoon, “Yung gusto ko ang sundin mo, at ikaw ay may karunungan.”

(as some other individual) One can be happy who one has a sense of accomplishment, “Nagawa ko ito hindi mag-isa, kundi kasama ko ang Panginoon.”

These are the foolish people who will say, “I don’t need God. I need only God when I’m in extreme fear, extreme pressure. I need the world and the world is just passing. I must live my life, living in this world with only one aim: to be happy.”

(as Mary) Ano ang sinasabi ni Maria? “Kung ako man ay may espesyal na papel, ‘Salamat, Panginoon!’ Pagpapakumbabang sinabi kong, “Lahat ay nanggaling sa Diyos. Walang nanggaling sa akin. Lahat ay sa Kanya!”

Nasa paanan siya ng krus at sinabi niya sa kanyang anak, “Dalawa tayong maghihirap. Pati ako nagdurusa. Pati ako namamatay para sa iyo, Anak.”

(as all of us) Doing the will of God and saying “Yes, oh, yes...” Kahit ano ang mangyari, “Yes pa rin.” Kahit mahirap, “Yes, Lord... Your will be done.”

This preference for the direct address mode is buttressed by the rather extensive use **2nd-person pronouns** such as *“ikaw (you as subject), ka (you as predicate), mo (you as singular), iyo/inyo (your/s)”*: **42 times**. The preponderance of these pronouns serves to endow the preaching with an almost personal intimacy and appeal and to present the preacher “as though he were addressing a single individual in his congregation” (Smith 72).

Most of the direct quotations, however, are fictive, found neither in Sacred Scriptures, nor in historical experience. Some appear as vulgar paraphrases of traditionally held religious events, e.g. Mary’s words at the foot of the cross. They were deployed not to convey authenticity but to add a personal and melodramatic touch to the message, to “hit it right home,” by putting invented words into imagined mouths. And by the assumption of

any one of these, the narrational voice (Fr. Sonny Ramirez' voice) "embodies the discourse in the speech, decisions emotions and convictions of a person" (Robbins 72). The voice becomes a force, assumes the image of that other person, represents him/her, becomes author of those words which it directly conveys, on the other's behalf.

### Argumentative Texture

Basic in clergy formation is philosophical education, the portals of which, are guarded by logic, the science of correct, inferential thinking. Crucial, then, to the preacher's craft is the **logical construction of the arguments** of his oration.

Preaching-as-construct is not a mere spontaneous effusion of words. It is a "genre with a particular form or *disposition*, which remains fairly constant throughout the history of preaching" (Smith 44). There is almost always a single main text called the *thema*, and its usually tripartite division and from this basic framework of text and division, history has spun several distinct sermon structures.

There is the (1) **sermon de un solo tems**, which is schematized according to the form of (Aristotelian and Ciceronian) classical rhetorical oration, consisting of a *propositio*, a *narration*, a *confirmation* and *peroration*;

There is the (2) **homilia** which is a simpler and freer exposition of the letter of the Gospel, which may consist of a *salutation*, an *introduction* or *prae-paratio per modum exordia*, the *cuerpo del sermon* or the *pars didactica (circa sensum literalem)*, and an *exhortation morum*;

There is the (3) **paradoxon**, which weaves together or contrast a gospel text and an *autoridad*.



# Reading the Politics of Preaching

*“Power bellows forth its own majesty sometimes in the rituals of force and authority, but more commonly, in the insidious whispers of ways of imag(in)ing forms of pleasure and entertainment” (Chaney 14).*

It is the logo of the 1998 General Chapter of the Order of Friars Preachers, held in Bologna, Italy. Emblematically, it is composed of four elemental icons: the star, a traditional iconographic symbol of St. Dominic; the staff of the itinerant; the words *Vade, Praedica* (“Go, Preach”); and the knife.

Officially, the icons are interpreted most benevolently: The star “represents the light that radiates from his face (Dominic’s)... a premonition of the fact that he would one day be a light to the nations, to illuminate those who walk in the darkness and in the shadow of death”(PHILDOM Newsletter, 1998; de Franchet 9).

The staff of the itinerant and the words “Vade, Praedica” represent the “apparition Dominic saw in Rome...in which St. Peter gave him the staff and St. Paul gave him the book; they told him precisely “Go, preach” (de Franchet 25).

Finally, the knife calls to mind a phrase attributed to St. Dominic, indicating the type of legislation he wanted for his brothers. “Were we to hold that the law of the Order would oblige under pain of sin, Dominic himself would have gone from convent to convent, and with his knife, would have stricken out the entire rule” (taken from *De vita regulari*, vol. II, XIII).



Fig. 6 Statue of Santo Domingo de Guzman, located at Caleruega, Batangas, Philippines; peculiar feature is depiction of Dominic "barefoot and carrying a knife," signifying "itinerancy and readiness to cut away at anything that obstructs preaching"

But as symbols, they are always already overdetermined. In their surfeit of meaning, these icons could be read as symbols of power, as political statements. The light of the star is power over darkness: intellect over emotions; truth over error and ignorance; preacher over people. The staff of the itinerant is the staff of the chief shepherd, the rod of dominion and discipline, the scepter of power of the Church, in the Church. The Latin words are imperatives, command and commission, declarations from authority, and definitions of authority. The knife is an instrument for dissection and division, a weapon for enforcement, a power-tool wielded in defense and/or defiance, for cutting up, cutting out, cutting through, and cutting away.

Thus, the sign of the preacher is a sign of power. Beyond the excellence of knowledge and eloquence of speech, the preacher emits political scent and

sense. In the sublime and supernatural intentions of his craft are embedded the wiles of worldly ways, the projections of power.

This chapter sets out to ask, “How is the politics of preaching?” While still following the gridlines of Robbin’s socio-rhetorical criticism, the study professes apolitical interest. In these multi-arena extra-textual readings, the point of the pursuit is after the manifestations and masks of power relation and its effects.

### A Political Reading of Intertexture

The prefix plots the status of this query: “*Inter*,” the space between texts, which is not at all empty but traversed by vectors and currents of relation. “So texts stand at all times in relation to other texts,” such relations being “theoretically infinite” (Robbins 96).

Intertextual interpretation presumes the existence of constellations of texts, in variegated relations of dependence and difference, all of which accompany a text, go with it, and make up its context. These are texts before text, texts simultaneous with it, texts against it, texts which inform it from all sides which link up to it and or break away from it.

In a broad sense, what is outside a text includes all modes of influence which comes into the orbit of a text’s production and reception, explicit and implicit, texts around the author, and texts around the reader. It even extends to the further textures of culture, society, and ideology.

But this study is compelled to make “prepositional” decisions, to set the boundaries of its intertextual inquiry, to define what is outside it in relation to what is inside. Furthermore, this intertextual project has pronounced political interests: to point out the lines that cross the text, from and into other texts; and to show the aura and agenda of their power.

Preaching-as-text is verily an intertextual phenomenon. It is a human pedagogy of a divine subject matter, speaking not of itself but of the almighty Other. Almost immediately, its referential relation points to something outside itself, the primordial text of Christian Revelation, to which preaching is but an ancillary activity.

### Oral-Scribal Intertexture

The nomenclature denotes the consideration of other texts, spoken or written, which intersect with the fore **text, as forms of recitation, recontextualization,**

**and reconfiguration** (Robbins 97). An obvious instance of this intertexture is the recitation of the passage from the Gospel according to Luke, the first lines of Mary's Magnificat: "My soul, my *being glorifies the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for He has looked upon his servant in lowliness* (taken from Luke 1:46-48)". It is from the Gospel read prior to the homily, with minor alternations. This is followed by a vernacular paraphrased rendition, directly and dramatically addressed to the implied audience.

The homily also recasts some biblically-writ events in Mary's life, through two distinct series: The first **recounts the events as rhetorical questions**, begging the audience to silently confirm the outstanding examples of Mary: Annunciation, The Loss of Child Jesus in the Temple, The Wedding at Cana, The Crucifixion.

The second series is also rhetorical, albeit more dramatically elaborate. It weaves question, narration, and direct address which affects the transport of the audience into the event itself. Suddenly, they witness for themselves the Visitation. Suddenly, they are also at the foot of the cross, hearing Mary speak out her biblical unrecorded spiels.

With the oral-scribal intertexture, traced either insubstantial replication of words from the biblical text, or in a passionate recount of the content of that other text, the preaching reconfigures the words and events of the previous text **to be almost contemporaneous with the audience**. Such reconfiguration applies also to the preacher who assumes the status of an omnipresent commentator on the proceedings.

All these efforts at recitation, reconfiguration, and recontextualization make for **evocations of authority**. It is God speaking now. It is Scriptures happening now. It is Salvation being delivered straight from the preacher's instrumental mouth. "His Word is My Word." By the power of direct quotation and liberal paraphrase, the preaching and the preacher attain a privilege and an urgency to be heard and heeded.

### Historical Intertexture

Another recognizable intertextual influence is provided by history, i.e. the textual past, as reverberated or muted in the present text. This history "in" a text is initially detected by **temporal features and indicators** (adverbs of time, verb tense, mention of historically prominent personages, etc.).

The anecdotal exemplum begins with “**Nang minsan...**” /Once upon a time... (#2), a known literary formula, for locating the happening in/of a story in an indefinite past. However, such repertoire does not attest to the facticity or historicity of the event narrated. Rather, it suspends the tale “somewhere in time,” which is not the point of its telling, but an **attempt to attach it to the concrete grounding of some person (Fr. Ramirez), or some place** (Tulungan Center). As it allegedly refers to the outside, to what happened then, it calls attention to itself. The tale stands for itself, not as an archive pleading for verification, but a fiction furtive about its fabrication. But the past of the text is not pure invention. The past becomes an object of reverence in the text. One looks back at the past as one looks upon the more original, and therefore, more ideal state of being. It is the prescribed model for life and action, the bright point of comparison and contrast to our mortal present (and bleak future).

The best time was then.

“noong nabubuhay siya / when she was alive (#7)

“when that angel came to her

“nang nawala si Hesus / when Jesus got lost

“nang sinabi ni Hesus doon sa wedding sa Cana / when Jesus told her something, during the wedding at Cana (#14)

“nang kailanganin siya ng kanyang pinsang si Elisabet / when her cousin Elizabeth needed her... (in) “the hill country of Ain Karim.”

“nang nakita niya na si Hesus ay naghihirap sa krus /when she saw Jesus suffering on the cross (#17)

The life of Mary in the Biblical past is an example for the present, held up before the audience with the mention of Ain Karim meant to impress as the text of our former glory.

This other text, this representation of the better original, is historically tenuous. The actuality of its referent events is suspect. Many Christians often associate the truth of the Scriptures with its real occurrence. It is true; therefore, it did happen. It is something to be believed because it came ahead of us. The truth of the previous is obvious. But this has been too easily and uncritically assumed. The spheres of theology and history do not often coincide.

**The telling of the past, esp. in the context of preaching, serves not a historical function, but a religious one, and, yes... a political one.**

So, what happens now? How is the present in preaching? How current is its message?

“At nakikita po natin sa buhay natin,... ng karaniwang tao ngayon... masyadong nilalamon sa science, sa computers, sa technology... / And we can see in our lives (and) in the lives of ordinary people today (that) we are addicted to science, computers, technology (#5)

“influenced by the world... slaves of the world.. prisoners of the values, and the wants and the desires of the world (#10)

So, the picture of the present is one that isn't at all rosy. It is the other term, opposite and inferior to the past. It is the haven of vices: ambition, conceit, avarice, deceit, frivolity, foolishness, materialism, individualism—everything that is set against God.

Of course, such analysis is quite sweeping, a stylistic and simplistic moralization of complex social problems. It is a predictable topography for preaching, a fitting locale for its contrasting rhetoric of vituperation. It is a “pressure-cooking, meat-tenderizing” rhetorical device that puts the audience in a mood and situation of extreme vulnerability and docility. There is nobody else to blame but ourselves, here and now.

The other text of the present which is experienced by the audience serves as counterpoint. It bounces off the meaning of the fore-text of the present as preached, as interpreted by the preacher. But the present is not only a picture painted by preaching; it is also a program of resolving action.

“**Bayaan mong...masaktan ka ngayon, mahirapan ka ngayon** / *Let yourself be hurt now, suffer difficulty now...Suffer a little now*” (#15)

The criticism demands a chastening...a penitential cutting of the Gordian knot of multiplex social crises. But its prescription is equally a description. The world is suffering now and has no need for preaching to rub it in. It states the obvious, the already and awfully painful truth, which it variedly lightens and burdens with reference to an opiate transcendent.

Moreover, the historical intertexture stretches towards the future, weaves its prospects for tomorrow as grounded on today, a challenge hurled from this point in time (the preaching moment) towards an indefinite future (as closing bracket to the opening bracket of an indefinite past):

**“Yan ang hamon ko sa bawat isa sa atin ngayon: ‘Pag nagdasal ka ng rosary, magpakumbaba kang humingi ng karunungan sa Panginoon, at ‘yan ang ibibigay sa iyo, gaya ni Mariang ating ina.’ / This is my challenge to all of us here today: When you pray the rosary, humbly ask for wisdom from the Lord, and it shall be given to you, like Mary our mother. (#21).**

The text of the other is now beyond the preaching. Its energy is transformed and transferred to the audience, who must act it out, sometime in the future, who must ascertain the effect of preaching, not in the immediacy of its hearing, but in the practical conversion of their lives. And as what the preaching concludes, the audience must move on to the economy of prayer: “Pray, ask, and it shall be given to you” (from Luke 11:9).

In the preaching discourse, historical intertexture occurs in the forms of references and reconstructions of the past (in the preacher’s life, and in Mary’s life as depicted), as source and exemplar of Christian truths. Moreover, reference to present events is not matter-of-fact statements, but tactical and stylistic generalizations of the preacher, oriented towards the preacher’s imagined but conservative future. The historical intertexture points out the “text” of Mary in the past, as the answer to the conundrum of the text of the present, as drab dabbling of an uninspired future. “Do it like Mary did. Do it now. And it will be done, as it is in heaven.” The historical intertexture confirms the demonstrative nature of the epideictic genre of the preaching, not to lead into judgment, not to move into deliberative action, but to please safely with historically-neutered account. And into this space slides the preacher as the author of preaching and the authority of history. The performance of his fiction makes for a gifted state of a temporal omniscience.

### **A Political Reading of Social and Cultural Texture**

The relation of text extends not only to other texts but to forms of life that situate it, to the society and culture that allow its emergence. Thus,

the reading of preaching could be furthered by a program of context-specification, a critical description of the textual milieu. This analysis utilizes “anthropological and sociological theory to explore the social and cultural nature of the voices in the text under investigation” (Robbins 144).

The text would be then read as the specific, material depiction or concealment of a cultural portrait, a map plotting the various forms of societal life. This study focuses on certain features which point out the contextual instance of preaching.

Accordingly, the resources of the social sciences in analysis and interpretation shall be organized on the basis of three kinds of rhetorical topics in texts: (a) **specific, material topics**, which display the social response to the world, in the discourse; (b) **common topics**, which display the social and cultural systems and institutions that are the media of exchange in the discourse; (c) the final strategic categories, which display the cultural location and orientation of the discourse (Robbins 39).

### Specific Topics

Bryan Wilson constructed a typology of religious sects which Robbins adapted as socio-rhetorical descriptions of religious responses to the world. This artifice would be helpful in extracting the **specific rhetorical topics in the preaching text** (Wilson 22-45; Robbins 147).

The preaching text manifests several strains and strands of response, which stitch together a specific aspect of its social texture. The basic argument of the preaching reveals a gnostic manipulationist orientation. It points out the specificity of “wisdom of God” as remote cause enabling people to perform extraordinary things (#3), e.g. composing *Magnificat* (#1), dressing festering wounds (#2). This wisdom is not of this world and leads one out of this world, not learned in school, nor equated with technological advancement (#5).

*“May mga bagay-bagay na nagagawa ka, nang hindi dahil sa pera o dahil sa mundo...May nagagawa ka, dahil sa mga may kaunting karunungan na ipinahid sa iyo ang Panginoon. Ang karunungan ito ang nagdadala sa atin patungo sa kalangitan / There are things which you are able to do, not because of money or because of the world. You are able to do things, because of a little wisdom that God has anointed you with. This wisdom brings you to heaven.” (#3).*



So it is knowledge of a “particular and distinctive” kind, *gnosis* as “the only way of achieving spiritualized goals” (Robbins 148). Again, this is the whole question of moral agency, reformulated in terms of divine wisdom versus mere human knowledge. This wisdom is not common, but selectively bestows and infused by God on certain people (Mary). Access to this wisdom is a mystery, presumed by the preacher and audience as naturally given and taken along with the entire discourse of Christianity.

This core rhetoric blossoms into/through an **interversionist** elaboration, advocating a ‘flight from the world’ mentality. The side of wisdom, the side of God, the side of Christianity, the side of Mary, and the side of the preacher is opposed to the foolishness of the world, spelled out in education and career, financial and material sufficiency, and pleasure (#8). Recurring tirades against worldliness imply an “anti-secular development, anti-secular education, anti-secular progress” crusade. Less of the world means more in life. “One cannot see happiness in dealing with money, with the things of this world, and with the pleasures of the world” (#10).

The preaching text finally reveals a moral agenda that plays a conversionist tune. Its emotional propensity froths with the mushy “change-from-within” refrain. Its peroration towards a saintly *imitatio* (#s 19,21) as key to saving a corrupted world, pushes forth interior personal change as *conditio sine qua non* for exterior transformation but leaves out substantially any program of structural critique and societal action.

So, the preaching discourse specifically configures gnostic manipulationist, introversionist and conversionist responses to the world. True to its epideictic genre, the specific topics do not upset the audience. It speaks loud but carries a small stick. It lambastes the world as the antithesis of God but its critical function is radically-impotent. Its eloquence moves the passions, “touching” in its treatment, but reduces the question of action and application to simplistic moral mimesis, leaving society untouched and untransformed.

### Common Topics

To thicken the description of specific topics, the reading moves on to common topics, i.e. textual features that are comparable with other discourses evident in a given society and culture. The preaching text is thus made to dialogue with the rest of contemporary Filipino culture.

The language of the preaching text is the first site of its cultural disclosure. As noted previously, it is an odd and irreverent mixture and fissure of the English and Filipino language. However, its deliberate deployment of street-smart lingo calls attention to a shift in the cultural status of expletives and cusses and their radical inclusion in the vocabulary of the sacred.

“*Gago...Tanga...Hunggang..*” (#8, 12) are subsets of the derogatory category of the mentally inferior.” As nominative functions, they are considered as “*pagmumura*.”

Literally, “*mura*” is “cheap, of low value.” Conversationally, then, this would connote the “the low appraisal of an addressee,” a downgrading of the moral worth of a person (Hornedo 140-163). Traditional society would not allow its use banishing it to the realm of forbidden language, not to be taught, not to be learned. Bad words have no place in a good world.

However, these words have managed to persist and endure at the fringes of civil society. They continue to be spoken, not infrequently by significant sectors of the unsophisticated masses. This is language on the edge formally and officially relegated to the periphery, but materially resistant and defiant against its conceptual and functional annihilation.

Through the philosophical movement of realism, this marginal discourse of expletives and cusses has been allowed into the halls of the mainstream. What was once taboo now bears the trademark of “true-to-life.” They became commonplace in drama and cinema, adding a touch of authenticity to script and shot.

But what accounts for their presence in holy preaching? Can the high language of the divine admit such patois irreverence? The initial experience of listening to such imprecating remarks is one of shock. “*Ano ito? Paring nagmumura? / What is this, a priest saying bad words?*” As shock subsides, the listening experience settles down to a pleasantly familiar mode. The expletives turn out to be touchstones to the popular; the cusses coax the audience. Suspending the moral adjudication of their use is such a religious context; they affect an adequation of the language of the masses with the language of God, through preaching. The audience gets to identify with the cussing preacher. He is one of them, one with them, in the irreverence of language and thought. It is a radical incarnation of the Word.

The cultural texture is also embroidered in the textual presence of humor. This is a desired quality in oral discourse. There must be light moments in public address, to sweet-coat the blandness of ideas, to open the mouth in laughter, to open the mind to thought. It pleases to be funny.

But a joke is always carefully contextual, not “in the utterance alone but (it) can be identified in the total social situation” (Douglas 293). There are no clear-cut procedures to their effective practice, but a “congruence of the incongruent,” a configuration of wit, word, and the spatiotemporal appropriateness of meaning and materials.

“*Pagbibiro*” is the Filipino term for “joking” and “teasing,” a comic assault upon the established order, playing upon form and control, a compass to the absurd, the ridiculous, the funny.

Phenomenologically, a joke juxtaposes at least two disparate elements, one element being dominant and controlling, the other as subordinate and controlled. Through the joke, the controlled subordinate achieves a momentary triumph (Douglas 296).

In the preaching text, a joke formula is embedded in the anecdotal exemplum (#2), accompanied as it is by a panning shot of the amused audience snickering. The juxtaposed elements are the general aversion for the foul and festering versus the dressing of a wound. Reduced to its simplest terms, is the binary of the clean-unclean/ pure-impure. The prior term bears the dominant control, propped up by such explicit and despicable reference to “*bakukang, ulcers...parasites...kurikong...hindi na yata maganda ang ayos, ang amoy.../ s/ he has ulcers...infested by parasites...the appearance is disgusting, and so is its smell*” and the observer’s representative remark “*hindi ko gagawin ‘yang ginagawa mo.../ I would not do what you are doing...’*” (#2). To be clean, to be pure, is to avoid any contact with the unclean, the impure. But this control of the discourse “flees towards” the wound. The unclean, the impure gets to be done, the subordinate term gets to be actualized and prioritized, albeit temporarily, in the order of execution, despite its social unacceptability and Fr. Ramirez’ own commentary, “*Ako rin, hindi ko rin gagawin ito... ba, kahit na isang milyong piso pa ang babayaran mo sa akin...*” (I, too, would not do this, even if you pay me a million pesos.) Through this, a paradox is posed in the mind of the audience, if you would not do it, why are you doing it?” But such a question does not beg an answer, but an immediate, intuitive grasp of the hilarious.

This joke “offers a symbolic pattern of a social pattern occurring at the same time... expressive of the social situations in which they occur” (Douglas 58). Fr. Ramirez’ telling effectively recreates the atmosphere of abhorrence towards wound-dressing, which the audience identifies with and affirms as a social convention. This order is tactically destabilized by the actual, absurd but heroic performance of the despised deed. As it mirrors social reality, it distorts its imaging. Although the material may be deemed inane and inappropriate in the context of a religious ceremony, or even unrelated to the theme of the preaching, this is overlooked, on the basis of the comic relief that it accords, the “mass appeal” that it wraps around the discourse.

From the rhetorical perspective, this would be a device of the **silly self** (In German, *selig*, “blessed”). This tactic unseals argumentative positions by unrestrained indulgence, by flagrant and extravagant display of unbridled emotions and carnivalesque antics (Bailey 44-47). Through the strategic and playful posturing of an “incongruous” tale, what is induced is not only laughter but mutuality, an assertion of a moral relationship between joker and audience (Bailey 71).

In the context of a preaching text, the tale serves as an interesting come-on. It calls attention, not to high-handed theological questions, but to everyday amusing situations. By a momentary unsettling of the dominant order, the audience gets to relax with the light moment, let go of control, of modicum civility. They get to trust the preacher who has won their hearts through laughter. They are made to be conducive, to be open to the veiled assertions and subtle persuasions of the preacher.

A third note on the cultural texture crafted by the preaching text is found in its more-than-generous dosage of emotion. Although it has been granted that displays of emotions are devices for persuasion, this is especially resonant in the context of the Filipino (Bailey 12).

The preponderance of dramatic monologues (#s 11, 12, 14, 17), the orchestration of mood music at certain crucial moments, and the treatment of the theme itself, define the thrust of the preaching as directed towards the “heart (in contrast to the head) of the matter,” towards passionate display and arousal.

It has been noted that the Filipino is a sucker for romance, i.e. for discourse that panders to the emotions, through a formulaic contrivance of

commonplace experiences and events. Though its matter is the ordinary, its mores are categorical ideals, clear-cut and simplistic.

The preaching text exploits this soft spot. Because it has positioned the wisdom of God against mere human knowledge, it indicates that its total appeal is not to the intellect, but to the emotions. By reducing its arguments to the simplest terms and avoiding logical encumbrance, the preacher text presents itself light enough for the head, whole heavy on the heart. By pounding on the necessity of patience, of waiting (#13), of suffering for a whole (#15), of extending (pseudo)charity (#16), of (over)bearing obedience (#6), it affirms and assumes unproblematically the crises of the present, not to be solved by an intelligent intervention but to be accepted meritoriously as something absolutely willed from above. By accentuating the dramatic moments of Mary's life (#14, 17) as mirror to the present existence, it repeatedly invites the audience to look, to gaze at the object of Christian emulation (#17), marking a shift from the cerebral to the visual. By being packaged as an inter-sensorial experience, it aims to please, rather than to prove, to praise, rather than to probe, to touch rather than to radically transform, to entertain rather than to explain. By its deliberate mode and manner, it prefers to be popular, but not necessarily critical; to be "in step" with the times and culture, at the expense of truth and conviction.

Overall, the common topics manifest a capitulation to the popular. By the deployment of culturally resonant topics to prove mass appeal, the preaching has managed a break with the dominant, high-browed, classic tradition of sacred eloquence. It has taken up the language of the street as the medium for divine revelation. It has mustered humor to beguile the audience into familial, spontaneous, and highly gullible position; it has played upon the emotions, contrived dramatics, tapped into the romantic consciousness of the audience, to affect a pleasure-ridden contraption of medium and meaning.

But this surrender to the popular is always already a subjugation of the popular. The expletive that identifies the preacher with the people also installs him over the people. The more he becomes likable, the more he becomes believable, knowledgeable, and powerful. The joke that lightens the audience bears down on them the irresistible persona of the preacher. The emotions that are laid thick on the preaching entrap them in the political

concoctions of the preacher. Thus, all these efforts at endowing common topics and appeal on the preaching prove to be ways of captivating the heart and capturing the mind of the unsuspecting populace.

### Final Categories

In the treatment of final, strategic categories, a typology of cultures developed by Robbins shall be selectively employed, to reckon the location and orientation of the discourse in a given socio-cultural setting. The question is posed: "What cultures are voiced out by the preaching text?" (168-170).

First, discourse presupposes a dominant culture which it either affirms or negates which structures and supports values, attitudes, dispositions and norms, imposed upon people in the macro-level of individual mentality. This is posed as the "big picture" of life and reality, the ground for meaningful happening, for the articulation of specific rationality, for the exercise of power and resistance.

In the preaching text, the dominant culture appears to be that of the contemporary, secular world, Filipino life here and now, summarily described and decried as materialistic, individualistic, hedonistic, and agnostic. Of course, this is too sweeping a statement, referring not to things and people as they are, but as a kind of rhetoric percussion, to establish rhythm and build up movement in the argument and artifice of the text.

By the critique that it offers, the preaching text gives voice to the **sub-culture** of a Filipino Christian. They are "in the world, but not of the world." They are related conceptually to the dominant secular culture. They know its language, its fads, its tastes, its technologies, its truths, its mores and values, its measures and pleasures. But they are called to be more, to stand high above the rest of groveling humanity. While they proffer imitation and adaptation of the dominant way of life, they insist upon their distinction. This is the church in the contemporary world, secularized, updated, "in" with the times, but summoned to transcendence.

But this Christian subculture has a stringent counter-culture. Its gnostic manipulationist stance consecrates it, sets it apart from the world, by the possession of the mysteries of the kingdom. And it reels its introversionist head by its constant attack upon the world and its values. The church-going Christian is ever exhorted to go against tide and grain, to shun the world,

to convert from its profligate ways. By posing the classic schema of *civitas Dei versus civitas mundi*, it draws upon the topography of the preaching discourse, a line of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, according to the preaching, the Christian is in, and the non-Christian is out; the church-goer is in, the unchurched is out; the un-worldly is in, the materialistic is out.

The surfacing of specific topics, common topics, and final cultural categories in the preaching text makes for a rich description of its socio-cultural texture. But these cultural demarcations are made on constantly-shifting (and deceiving) terrain. The preaching text murmurs other voices, piercing through the dominant culture, the sub-culture and even the counter-culture; syncopated in the crowd-drawing and crowd-pleasing techniques (the anger exploded by an expletive, the laughter teased out by a joke, the spirited stirring of emotions), drawn from the cultural shock of the audience; traced in the religious responses *topicalized* in the text. These previously unheard voices offer an alternative account of the preaching discourse. It tells of a preaching that is safe in its content, carved from the classical theological mold. But it also tells of a preaching that breaks new ground, televisual, glitzy, and plebeian. By the harnessing of anything and everything that would capture and cater to the crowd, it has merged the height of the pulpit with the sweep of the popular, the gravity of the sacred with the flightiness of the masses. It has formed a new culture of preaching: Media preaching and pop preaching.

### A Reading of the Ideological Texture: THE POLITICS OF PREACHING

From the multiple definitions of ideology, Terry Eagleton offered this nuance: ideology is the way “in which what we say and believe connect with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in...those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving, and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power” (Eagleton 14-15).

Seen in this vein, ideological texture is more than the network of ideas, or cultural content, or institutional perspective. It is the politics, which traverse a text, the pressure points which are plotted by its inner textures, enmeshed with its intertextures, constellated in its social and cultural textures. It is the summary question of power in a discourse: who/what holds it, who/what is held under it, the modes of its extension and exercise.

## Ideology in a Text

An analytic of power, outlined by Dreyfus and Rabinow in their study of Foucault, shall guide the reading of **the ideology of the preaching text** (Dreyfus and Rainbow 208-226).

As has been noted, the preaching text reeks with binaries of opposite relations, which point to a “system of differentiations” (principle 1) that sets dominance (in thought and action) vis-à-vis subordinate positions. The protracted arguments by contrast indicate the following:

Wisdom of God/human, worldly knowledge

Wisdom in Mary (#1) / Wisdom not in ordinary humans (#5)

Obedience to God (#6) / foolishness (#8)

Spiritual values (#9) / worldly happiness (#s 8, 10, 12)

Patience (# 13)/intolerance towards suffering (#15)

Charity (#16)/ ineffective knowledge (#16)

This series of differentiations echoes Manichean extremities, the black-and-white doctrine of God versus the world, spirit versus matter, good versus evil. It establishes the prior terms as superior to the secondary terms, relates by subordination rather than reciprocity, and empowers one over and against the other. Thus, it defines the conditions of Christian salvation, canonizes the right way (moral imitation of the saints) vis-à-vis the wrong way (the present, self-seeking life).

Such contrapositions are not mere matters of style. They link up with the “**objectives**” and **aims** (principle 2) of power, of those who/which act upon the thought and action of others, in and through the preaching discourse. The text officially articulates this as the **exaltation of Mary (#21: “*Mabuhay si Maria!* / *Long live Mary!*”)**, and the sweeping **call to imitation** (#s 19, 21) addressed to the implied audience. Because she is eminently good, she must be followed. Because she is on the side of God, she must be honored and to do otherwise would be dishonorable, ungodly, disobedient, and evil.

These discursive objectives are brought into being and relation with the rest of the text by discursive “**means**” (principle 3). This is achieved by the eloquent **portrayal of Mary as epitome of virtue**: She is wise (#s 1, 4, 20), obedient (# 7), patient (#14), and charitable (#17). On the other hand, there is the other vivid



depiction: The world as the antithesis of virtue: It is foolish (#s 8, 12), disobedient (#10), intolerant to suffering (#15), and ineffectual in action (#16).

These contrasting portraits are then positioned as **powerful moral mirrors**, to which the audience must look in order to appraise the state of their souls. The first mirror (Mary) is the beautiful ideal of Christian life; she mirrors the original excellence of God. The second mirror bears the image of the distorted world. By means of portraits and mirrors, the stated objectives of exaltation and imitation are brought into the foreground of the preaching text.

Then comes the identification of “forms of institutionalization of power” (principle 4). There are at least two institutions implicit in the discourse. First, there is the office of the preacher, who is the immediately obvious and not so obvious architect of the discursive apparatus. The preaching text invests the preacher with the power to author and authorize the portraits, to assemble their elements, to sew them up with some loose logic, to position their double mimetic on opposite sides of the audience. The preacher’s hand is traced all over the place; it is his voice which reverberates throughout, which proclaims the truths of the spirit and maligns the ways of the world. Unproblematically, the preacher attains to a position of expertise in moral discourse.

But this office of the preacher is but a cog in the larger edifice of power, a mere atomic function in the **mega-institution of the Church**. It is the Church that wields the power to preach, the power to sanctify, to teach, and to rule; the power to pronounce and prescribe sacred orthodoxy, and to represent God and his cosmic agenda. It is the Church that looks up and back to Mary. It is the Church that holds this public religious gathering—the hearing of this preaching. It is the Church that sits this audience and includes them in the ambit of the holy. It is the Church that holds up this portrait. It is the Church that mirrors on stage this age-old moral play (*theatrum moralis*) of good-versus-evil, God-versus-the-world.

Thus, the preaching text assumes the preacher and the church as the immediate and remote principles of its discursive unity, as micro- and macro-institutions of its power. Into the official intent of exalting and imitating, Mary is inserted and is interposed the controlling image of preacher and over-arching vista of the church. They are essential intermediaries, vital links in the chain of command and influence. And, by quite an innocent assumption, they have become instrumental forms of exaltation

and imitation in themselves. To honor God is to honor Mary, is to honor the Church, is to honor the preacher. To follow God is to follow Mary, is to follow the Church, is to follow the preacher.

Finally, there is the analysis of the “**degree of rationalization of power relations**” (principle 5). As the preaching text belabors its argument by contrast, it literally piles up examples of Mary’s words and actions on the dominant side, while thrashing the subordinate side with expletives and vices. By some loose logic, this is offered to the minds of the audience. And with the lubrication of emotions, this is eased into their hearts as well. This is the truth, therefore, it must be believed.

But where do the agencies of this binary opposition (preacher—church) stand? They do not take the impartial middle ground. They are always already included in the discourse, biased to one side of the text. They are always already the good guys, the holy and chosen ones. They are the bulwark of faith and morals and dispenser of the sacred mysteries. They preside over their side of the argument and build it up into an impregnable fortress of unassailable scriptures and traditions, dogmas, morals, canons, and rubrics. They denounce the other side as the heretical outside and/or the damned underside. Deputized by God, preacher and church pronounce *ex cathedra* and *anathema*, and enforce inclusion and exclusion, salvation and damnation, the moral and the immoral, the supreme power from above and the absolute corruption from below, the things of God and the things of this world.

As agents of the preaching discourse, preacher and church are also its guarantors. They are authorized to become authorities in themselves, authority over speech and audience, authority over the churchgoers inside and authority over and against the world outside.

The preaching and the preacher, the text and the agent, are assumed to be on the high ground of the argument. The rationale of the preaching text does not only apply to Mary as the object of emulation, but vests both preacher and church with power over and through the discourse, and with privileged probity in the minds, in the hearts, and in the senses of the Christian believers. (“*Basta’t sinabi ng pari...*”)

Thus, the preaching text proffers an “**ideology of conformity.**” In its multifarious textures, it presents the authentic and supreme *form* of Christian life. At the same time, it *deforms* the present world as false and inferior. It

*performs* all these by an elaborate and studied portrayal. It *informs* the audience and rouses them to *conform* with its moral demands. It is necessary to accept this “ideology of conformity-deformity,” in order to gain the benefits from this preaching, from Mary, and from God. In other words, one needs to accept what is preached in order to become what is preached. This discourse and its ideology forms the need, reasons, and conditions for this form of discourse and its ideology.

### Ideology in Interpretations

Ideology is not only confined to the text. The question of power extends to the **interpretations of the text**, the ideology of minds and modes beholding it. For no analytic judgment, no measure of meaning is “value-free.” Both preacher and interpreter, creator and critic always already stand within discourse. And whatever texts and counter-texts they engender are but functions of their discourse, meaning-effects that are always already “ideology-laden,” ensnared in the web of power-relations.

The preaching of Fr. Sonny Ramirez is well-liked and sought by many people. They find it differently appealing—it makes them laugh and cry, sings to them, gets angry at them, touches them, moves them, and convinces them. But this is only one version of the story.

In the higher ecclesiastical circles, however, among bishops and priests and theologians and his own religious brethren, there is another interpretation. It is Fr. Sonny Ramirez deconstructed, disarmed of his charms, sniggered at his claims, and sobered up in his antics. He may make his point; connect with the “lower” masses, but not with the “upper” clerical echelon, not with “those who really know.” They find it too near the ground of the common, but too far from the heights of the sublime.

While the common people take his preaching at face value, the clergy finds it superficial, shallow in content, “just a show.” It is a low kind of preaching.

There are now at least two modes of interpretation of the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez. The first is mass-based, affirmative and appreciative, and admits the following presuppositions:

1. The audience (as community of interpreters) finds the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez as appealing. They like its form.

2. The audience (as community of interpreters) finds the preaching of text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez as the true representation of the revelation of God, and of the moral state of the world. They believe its content.
3. The audience (as community of interpreters) recognizes Fr. Sonny Ramirez as authority, truthful, and trustworthy. They believe him.

The second practice of interpretation, however, is clergy-based, exclusivist, critical, and downgrading. It bears the following assumptions:

1. The clergy (as interpreter) finds the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez as unappealing but accord to it minimum civility. They silently do not agree with its form.
2. The clergy finds the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez as doctrinally acceptable but wanting. They agree with its content but desire a deeper treatment.
3. The clergy recognizes Fr. Sonny as popular but is wary of his reputation. They know him but do not always believe him.

By contraposing these, the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez emerges as the site of an ideological conflict of interpretations, a struggle for power-knowledge. “High” and “low” do not refer to pre-given credentials and concepts but are politically-charged constructions. That clergy is “high” and laity is “low,” that this preaching is “high” and that preaching is “low” are not endowments of nature, but the effects of power (and resistance) in the discourse that pronounces them. Such political confrontation leads to a problematization of the popular.

Raymond Williams noted that the term “popular” admits certain nuances: Popular as “well-liked by many people”; popular as antimony to high culture; popular as “made by the people themselves” (Williams 198-199).

That the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez is popular is mutually-granted by both clergy and laity. But this adjectival qualification concedes not only the sense of the popular as measured by audience-response, i.e. the swelling number of those who like to listen to him; but popular as a method of differentiation and subordination. It now serves as a term of contrast to “high preaching.” This is but a preaching to the people. It is not the best, nor

the loftiest, but the encompassing, the far-reaching—a preaching that stoops down, that reaches down to them. The people who patronize him before defined and demoted.

But this devaluation of the preaching text of Fr. Sonny Ramirez does not obliterate the text. It just “deposes” it, “puts it down” below the tiers of the discourse. The institutional church tolerates it and endures it as a concession to the indiscriminating and unsophisticated majority, in order to keep them appeased and at peace. In the pie of power, popular preaching is crumbs.

This consideration of the counter-interpretations of the preaching text yields an “ideology of subjection.” Preaching is always already subject to the institutional church. It is the church that subordinates preaching and preacher-effect, sets them down the hierarchy of order. And through the instrumentation of preaching, the audience—popular or clerical—likewise become subjects to the church, subjects of the church, held under the sway of its saving and (self?) serving power.

The ideological texture unmasks the preaching text to be more than a well-knit bundle of aesthetic and rhetorical devices, more than an oracle of the divine, more than an artifact of culture. It is a political implement. By its transcription, representation, instruction, and interpretation, it serves as power-tool for division and differentiation, for subjugation and control. By effecting the knowledge and power of the divine, preaching effects itself. Through the power of its own discourse, preaching becomes a discourse of its own power.

*“Charismatic leaders may be possessed of the gift of the devil, as well the gift of grace”  
(Glasman and Swatos 5).*

# Conclusion

*"The whole practice of Christian wisdom consists not in a profusion of words, in adroit argumentation or in a craving for praise and glory..."*

Pope Leo the Great

(taken from Sermo in Epiphaniae solemnitate)

In January 4, 1999, then President Joseph "Erap" Ejercito Estrada, along with Fr. Erasmo "Sonny" Ramirez, OP, and an aggrieved teenage rape victim, converged live on national television, to denounce a TRO-intervening Supreme Court, in the landmark state execution of convict Leo Echegaray. It was an image at once familiar and strange—a cinematic chief executive with a flair for hip-shooting witty punchlines as government policy, media emotionalism and sensationalism, and a publicity-hounded preacher. It is a collage suggestive of podium, stage, and altar, all at once—a bizarre trinity of priest, victim and avenger. Politics! Show business! Religion! Philippine-style!

A question is provoked, "What is the priest doing there?" His presence is a multi-faceted representation. On the one hand, he represents God on the side of the death penalty advocates; he baptizes them, and anoints their position as a morally-justified, heaven-approved crusade. On the other hand, he represents the church, albeit oppositionally; he divides its monolithic edifice and claims a portion of its blessings. It is a presence of difference—the face of God in the world; it is a presence in difference—another face of His church. It



**ERAP DISAPPOINTED.** President Estrada comforts rape victim Baby Echegaray as he expresses disappointment over the Supreme Court decision staying the scheduled execution of her stepfather by lethal injection at the New Bilibid Prison, Muntinlupa City. She was escorted by Fr. Sonny Ramirez and her guardian parents to Malacañang after hearing of the Supreme Court order. (Rudy Liwanag)

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Fig. 7 The power of Fr. Sony Ramirez' preaching extends beyond the pulpit, as exemplified by his very public influence in the stance of then-president Joseph "Erap" Estrada in favor of capital punishment, against the teaching of the Catholic Church.

is the presence of power—other-worldly and this-worldly, a stature endowed by moral competence and a signature enhanced by media (over)-exposure. It is the power of presence—a charisma that gets its own way and gets away with it. For "the priest" bears a name of fame: "Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP," a powerful preacher in many senses of the word, gifted with gab, tele-magnetic in appeal, sought by many, heard by many, seen by many, known by many: arguably one of the most popular priests in the Philippines. But the name is a sign, an overflowing spring of signifiers. "Fr. Sonny Ramirez" is

the Dominican preacher; “Fr. Sonny Ramirez” is the oasis of love for show business people; “Fr. Sonny Ramirez” is the spiritual counselor of the presidential movie star and the chairperson of the supra-censoring Board of Appeals.

“Fr. Sonny Ramirez” is the preacher to be invited, to be heard, seen, and talked to—the preacher of prestige and influence. But there is a story behind the name, a secret beneath the sign. There is a discourse behind the preacher, and behind the preaching. It is a story in shadows, a tale from the dark side and the underside, a sinister whisper drowned by the din of bombast, displaced/disclosed by the rhetoric of the sacred.

This story is told *otherwise*. It thus demands a disturbance, a catatonic unsettling of the surface and a destabilization of foundations. It begs to be different. It warrants an alternative reading, an insistent, persistent and resistant reading of preaching, of what preaching claims is not there.

The first task of this study is to establish its parameters in the context of a specific and contemporary critical theory. It asked: **How is the discourse of preaching? How is preaching as a discursive practice as explained by Michel Foucault?**

**Discourse**, retrieved by Foucault from the ancient Greek sophists, is understood to be a form of knowledge, measured not in terms of its eternal essence, but according to its contingent efficacy. Discourse sought not to contemplate truths but to seize them at the moment of action and application.

Thus, all bodies of knowledge, seen as discourse, are characterized **by the spectrum of objects, the perspectives of its subject-agent, the rules of its concept-formation, and the techniques of its material applications**. These criteria do not merely educe the nature-writ endowments of truth, nor do they define the scientific rationalization and impartial ordering of knowledge. These criteria constitute a complex self-serving mechanism. Its objects are not simply *things out there, in themselves*, cognitively captured by the act of knowing. These objects are invented by the discourse itself. The subject-agent is not the natural cause and author of discourse. The subject-agent is a perspective instigated and installed by the discourse itself. The rules of concept-formation are not simply encompassing, unchanging laws governing thought and being. Rules are time-bound, arbitrary norms, mandated, validated, and activated by the discourse itself. Strategies are



not disinterested methods of observation and data-gathering but are vested enforcement and tactics of control, and collusion perpetuated by the discourse itself. So discourse points to itself, not to truths beyond it. Discourse is about discourse—the ascendance, acceptance, and maintenance of its well-being.

The discourse of preaching claims for its object the Word of God and human words about God, but by presenting these objects of knowledge as the highest, the most eminent in the order of things, its field of scrutiny and speech rightfully extends and descends to other, “lesser” things: To overarching moral competence, to cultural and aesthetic judgment, to criticism-at-large, to mass media, to political influence, to having a “say” in anything and everything else, etc. **So, the objects which define preaching are themselves defined by preaching, functions of its enduring discourse.**

The discourse of preaching claims for its subjects, God as primary and ultimate agent, the institutional church as intermediate agent, and the preacher as remote, instrumental agent. On various levels, these agents become the principles of unity for the discourse of preaching, authorized to pronounce the sacred and denounce the profane. But these agents are neither points of origin nor references of meaning. They are not causes, but effects of the discourse. The subjects of preaching are subjects to preaching, constructed by preaching: Formed, instructed, ordained, consecrated. So, the agent-subjects who **enunciate preaching are themselves enunciated by preaching as functions of its enduring discourse.**

The discourse of preaching claims for its rules of concept-formation the entire deposit of faith and revelation: the word of God and the will of God articulated in sacred scriptures and preserved in apostolic tradition. From this divine reservoir, preaching founds itself, instructs itself, and mandates itself to be king, prophet and priest to the world. These rules “normalize” preaching: Rationalize it, prioritize it, and actualize it. But these norms did not drop down from heaven in one piece, nor did they spring out in full regalia or from some divine head. These norms are what Foucault called “historical a priori,” a conceptual field which precedes us, but which proceeds from us. Through the exigencies of time, the human species has aggregated these rules, altered them, and refined them. **So, the rules of concept-formation which normalize preaching are themselves normed by preaching as functions of its enduring discourse.**

The discourse of preaching claims for its strategies of application the complex of ecclesiastical discipline: Seminary formation, canonical procedures and penalties, liturgical rubrics, sacramental obligations, penance and penitence, encyclical and pastoral letters, dogmatic statements, etc. which bind people by holy obedience, under pain of sin. But these disciplines are not mere methods of benign “pasturing,” neither simple ordinances of reason for the common good, nor the sole bearers of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. These disciplines are tactics of power, effecting social control by coercion and consensus, by naked threats and subtle entreaties. So, the strategies of discipline which enforce order in and **through preaching are themselves enforced and ordered by preaching as functions of its enduring discourse.**

Thus, the characteristics which provide coherence and consistency, reason, and direction to the discourse are not mere properties, nor categories naturally flowing from the being of preaching. They are projections of the discourse, traces of the intersection of power and knowledge in it.

Preaching entails knowledge, to be gained and to be given. It is knowledge of the Divine, as well as knowledge of the human. It is variably an infused gift and an acquired project. At the same time, preaching entails power, given to the preacher by formation and training, and exercised by the preacher in ministry and action. It is power proceeding from the heavenly God and power proceeding from the earthly church. *A Deo, ab ecclesia.* By this knowledge and power, preaching effects itself, pontificates its pronouncements, canonizes, censures, binds and loosens the things of heaven and of earth. **Preaching knows itself and empowers itself by the knowledge and power of its own discourse.**

In order to concretely ground this theoretical connection of preaching and the discourse of power, this study then posed the question: **How is preaching to be read?** To read preaching is to render it as a text—a dynamic bundle of meaning and meaning-effects. The target text is a televised eucharistic homily of Fr. Sonny Ramirez, OP (recorded in VHS). The reading approach is socio-rhetorical criticism, which weaves four arenas of texture in the text.

First, the study went formalist. By reading **the inner textures**, it emphasized formal relations of signs in a text. This analysis reveals the preaching text to be a coherent ensemble with a pronounced opening-middle-closing,

replete with repetitions and progressions. It has a simple but protracted argument of contrast, employs narrative techniques and deliberately amasses sensory aesthetic devices to effect a distinct and studied performance. It manifests epideictic features, using comparisons and contrasts, polarities, extremities, antinomies, and intersensorial descriptions, in order to demonstrate traditionally-accepted and uncomplicated topics to an already-captivated audience. **The preaching text reveals its inner texture to be an easily-assembled, and easily-absorbed, popular form.**

But the question of the reading of preaching cannot just remain on the level of its form, on what is inside it. The preaching text exudes external traces, tracked and caught by this study as ulterior and ultimately political.

**Intertexture** emphasizes the relations of the foretext to other texts. This analysis reveals the presence of oral-scribal intertexts, forms of recitation and reconfiguration of words and events from other texts. It also reveals historical anchors, with referents to a real past, contemporaneous links with a real present, and faith-ascertained projection to a super-real future. **The preaching text reveals its intertextures to be simple endowments of authority and authenticity to its simple demonstrative form.**

The **social and cultural texture** emphasizes the resources of the social sciences as touchstones for organization and interpretation of the text according to rhetorical topics.

According to the typology of religious responses, the preaching text **manifests specifically *Gnostic manipulationist*** (special knowledge), ***introversionist*** (spiritual flight from the material world), and ***conversionist*** (priority of personal change) topics. The identification of these specific strands reveals the constitution of an elitist, exclusivist, hierarchized, privileged, self-serving and individualistic discourse at the heart of the preaching practice.

According to several findings of sociological and cultural studies, the preaching text also shares common topics significantly resonant with contemporary Filipino mass intercultural. Its generous use of *expletives, jokes and emotive appeals* brings preaching down from the high realms of classic eloquence to the low plains of popular speech and performance. But these efforts at touching base with the common bear a political agenda of subjugation *cum fide*.

Adapting a simple typology of cultures, the preaching text pre-supposes and yet opposes a dominant culture of the contemporary, materialistic world. It then proposes to the sub-culture of the Filipino Christian a counter-culture of strict, ascetic, spiritualistic discipline, which thus draws final, strategic lines of inclusion and exclusion, salvation and damnation among the audience.

These analyses reveal a context-sensitive and context-considerate assemblage. It demonstrates to its audience a distinct religious response, which resonates in the systems and institutions of the surrounding social ambiance, to set up a critique of the dominant culture, to cajole a sub-culture, and to herald a counter-culture. **The preaching text reveals its social and cultural texture to be a unique harnessing and creative merging of traditional and novel elements, theology and mass media, to produce an emergent form of popular preaching.**

Finally, these thick descriptions of the textual arena lead to the particular point of view espoused by this reading of the text. It asked: **How is the politics of such preaching?** By analysis of the **ideological texture**, it takes up again the question of power in the discourse.

Table 3. An Analytic of the Power of Preaching

<b>System of Differentiation</b>	Protracted Argument by Contrast God-world Mary-humans Obedience-foolish Disobedience Spirit-matter Patience-intolerance Charity-ineffective knowledge
<b>Goal of Power</b>	The Exaltation of Mary
<b>Means of Discourse</b>	Moral Mirrors: Mary as good versus the world as evil
<b>Forms of Institutionalization of Power</b>	The Office of Preacher; The Office of the Church

<b>Degree of Rationalization of Power Relations</b>	Ideology of Conformity: Imitation Ideology of Subjection: Obedience
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The preaching text unravels a system of differentiation, a series of binary oppositions. By this, it seeks to prioritize one term, to rain praises on it, to install it as an object of esteem and emulation. Such object is rendered visually-potent by means of moral portraits and mirrors. System, objectives and means are asserted and set up by institutional forms: the office of the preacher and magisterial office of the church, which are not impartial assessors, but always ready standing on the better side of the argument. These are rationalized by presenting and belaboring all-too-obvious argument by contrast, favoring one side, appreciating it, empowering it, and aligning themselves to it, as authors and guarantors. Through these, the preaching text proffers an **ideology of community**.

This ideology of conformity does not, however, contradict the above-mentioned final, strategic lines of inclusion and exclusion. For the edifice of power constructed by the dominant culture of Christianity verily admits and administers the sub-culture of the Filipino church, and even allows the proliferation of a counter-culture of populist spiritualism.

The issue of ideology also bears upon the interpretations of the preaching text, the power relations assumed by its varied and perspectival appraisal. Its unabashed mass proclivities draw lines of differentiation and division: High versus low, clergy versus laity. On the one hand, the preaching text is the popular by virtue of its mass audience approval. On the other hand, it is popular by virtue of underestimation by the clergy, by those equally and eminently involved in the preaching discourse. But these oppositional posturing link up in an ideology of subjection-subordination. Preaching subjects people (i.e. lay audience). In turn, preaching, especially popular preaching, is subjected to the rest of the preaching clergy. It is downgraded and downsized as an inferior, adulterated form. The institutional church, by virtue of its magisterial office, subjects them all: People, preacher, and clergy.

One could go further in linking up this ideology of subjection preached by the church to the broader and more insidious power-apparatus of modern

capitalist society. But in the specificity and locality of preaching's entrapment, the point of power applied and upheld touches down on a still grimy and very human earth.

Designating preaching as popular foregrounds an unresolved tension and struggle for power and meaning.

"Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power-relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience" (Fiske 4-5).

Politically speaking, popular preaching is both the affirmation and subversion of the dominant ideology (see Figure 6). In so far as it is sanctioned and tolerated by the institutional church, in so far as it is demeaned by the inner and higher circle of the preaching clergy, popular preaching appears as a form of social condescension and control, exercised remotely by the status quo. Yet, by its very triviality, by its catering and capitulation to the ephemeral whims and fads of the audience, by its raw reliance on unstructured charisma, popular preaching stands at the breaking point of the dominant sphere. In a sense, it is the lay's people's mode of counter-attacking the suffocating formalism of the institutional clergy. It is "made popular by people who resent their normal exclusion from the insider information of what is really going in society" (Fiske 176). At once, it is domination and resistance, authority, and rebellion.

Moreover, as it simultaneously and tenuously straddles the inside of the power circle of the institutional church, and outside with the lower laity, popular preaching gravitates towards other points and patrons of power. Politicians and show business people continuously seek its attention and identification. Such preaching approves them and blesses them. In turn, their power and prestige rub on preaching. Popular preaching thus enters into a dialectic of power with secular affairs. Popular preaching becomes powerful, not only because of its ecclesiastical endowment, not only because of its mass appeal, but also because it has stood and shared the limelight of political-cultural patronage. Popular preaching endorses candidacies and campaigns, whispers counter-theological arguments (for capital punishment, charter change, etc.), presides over "showbiz" functions, solicits financial generosity,

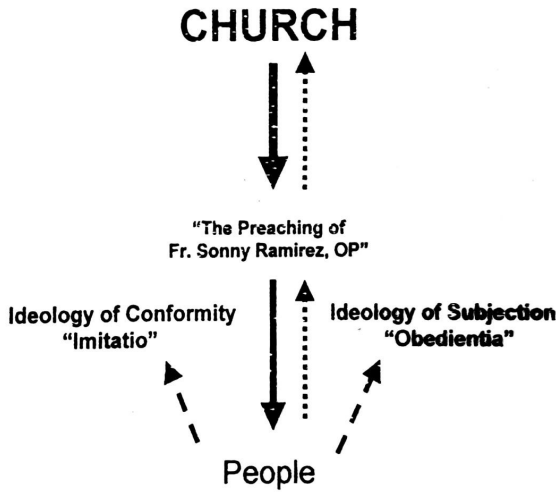


Fig. 7 The Relations of Power and Resistance in Popular Preaching

wins the confidence of people from all walks of life, and draws into its orbit the trappings of power and influence.

The power of preaching is not only applied downward, it is not a total subjugation of people. For in the very discourse of power, resistance is always already emergent amid the cracks and fissures of the preaching institution. By criticism's defiant spewing – from the clergy's snobbery to the laity's uniquely-involving fancies, popular preaching is forced to reformulate and reinvent itself, sometimes even beyond the bounds of its own conscious efforts. As preaching makes people, so people make preaching, and can unmake it by an informed and incessant demand for relevance and renewal in the manifold tasks of evangelization. Disagreement and disenchantment with popular preaching, less applause, less laughter and a thinner coffer are portents of a critical and resistant dawn breaking over the horizon.

So, how is the politics of preaching? **Preaching is a power of the church. Likewise, preaching is a power from the people. Finally, preaching is a power to/alongside/from people of secular note and importance.**

But such power of preaching is applied not so much for definitive establishment of God's reign on earth, neither for the structural transformation of society, nor for the radical conversion of people in government and entertainment, nor for the empowerment of people, and not for criticism, not for liberation. **Preaching is a political act. By its own power, it seeks to survive and subsist. By the order of its discourse, it wins personal assent and obedience, and establishes a hegemony of truth, utterance, societal control and influence.**

In preaching, the voice of God speaking from the beclouded peaks of an unapproachable mountain is not heard, nor the clarion calls of Being as being and its imperishable truths, rather, the sibylline echoes of power and discourse.

Preaching is thus cut down to size. Crucified in its mortal nature—amidst gasps for breath and grappings with doubts and despair – preaching can finally and only offer a confession: The honor of being hurt makes for the honesty of the humble, and the humanity of it all.

But after all these shall have passed, how is preaching still? How must preaching be? First, preaching must learn to live with its shadow of power. The what, why, and how of its sayings are always already political issues – the application of knowledge to effect an action on people.

Then, preaching must be wedded to criticism, to resistance to its guile and domination. By finite reflexivity, preaching must examine its heart and its conscience that it may learn to seek (and even pray) for an exorcism of its demons.

Finally, people are in power, too. People are in preaching, too. They make it and unmake it. And by an act almost like faith, a more sober people can discern the still small voice of the divine amid the tremulous sea of human wiles and the undercurrents and streams of power.

By this political criticism of the idolatrous pretensions of preaching, life is thus made less of the god it never was, and made more human, as always, as ever.

*"We wish to uncover the truth because it is so difficult to imagine it naked" (Fiske 4-5).*



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University of Santo Tomas, Manila

MA Literature, Philippine Literature *in English* and Cultural Studies (1995-2000),

Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City

Thesis: "The Power of Preaching/The Preaching of Power: A Criticism of Popular Preaching in the Philippines"

Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures [SSL] (1999-2003),

*graduated Cum laude*

Pontificio Istituto Biblico (Biblicum), Roma, Italia

Thesis: "On Reading Pentecost Preaching (Exegesis of Acts 2, 14-40)"

Doctorate in Sacred Theology [SThD] (2008-2013),

*graduated Summa cum Laude*

University of Santo Tomas, Manila

Dissertation: "Excavating Preaching: Archaeology and Exegesis of Preaching in the Synagogue in Luke-Acts" (defended 05 July 2012)

*with a semester of studies and research, AY 2009-2010,*

*Ecole Biblique Archéologique Française de Jerusalem Israel*

### Teaching:

*Sacred Scriptures (assistant professor, appointed in 2011)*

Faculty of Sacred Theology

University of Santo Tomas, Manila

2003-up to the present

- General and Special Introduction to Sacred Scriptures; NT Greek; NT Exegesis – Acts and Paul; NT Seminar – Preaching Luke-Acts;
- Church Pronouncements on Biblical Matters and Updates in Biblical Studies; Interpretation of Scriptures; Seminar on The Historical-Critical Method of Biblical Exegesis as Applied; Scripture/NT Themes in the Liturgical Years: Special Questions in Old Testament/New Testament (The Dead Sea Scrolls and Biblical Studies/The Jewish Background of the New Testament)

*Courses in Philosophy (professor)*

Philippine Dominican Center of Institutional Studies

Santo Domingo Convent, Quezon City

1995-up to the present

- Social Philosophy; Philosophy and Literature; Hermeneutics

*Courses in MA Preaching (professor)*

Institute of Preaching

Santo Domingo Convent, Quezon City

2006-up to the present

- Scriptures and Preaching; Hermeneutics in Preaching; Practicum in Preaching

Roles and Responsibilities:

At present:

- Rector and President  
*Colegio de San Juan de Letran*  
*Intramuros, Manila and Abucay, Bataan*  
*2015-2019*
- Chairperson  
*Council of Rectors*  
*Dominican Province of the Philippines*  
*2015-2016, 2016-present*
- Ex officio member, Board of Trustees
  - *Angelicum College, Quezon City (2012-present)*
  - *Colegio de San Juan de Letran, Calamba, Laguna (2015-present)*
  - *Colegio de San Juan de Letran, Manaoag, Pangasinan (2015-present)*
  - *Aquinas University of Legazpi, Albay (2015-present)*
  - *Angelicum School, Jaro, Iloilo (2015-present)*
  - *University of Santo Tomas, Manila (2015-2017)*
- Membership: Member, Board of Trustees; Treasurer
  - *Holy Rosary College Foundation, Inc.*
  - *2008-present*
- Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP)  
Since 2004
  - Board of Trustees (2006-2007)

- Treasurer, Board of Trustees (2010-2017)
- Vice-President, Board of Trustees (2017-present)

Previous works:

Director, Institute of Preaching (2010-2012, 2012-2016)

Member, DPP Commission on Intellectual Life (2012-2016)

Promoter of Evangelization through Social Communications; Member, Commission on Intellectual Life (2012-2016)

Member, Provincial Council, Dominican Province of the Philippines (2004-2008, 2008-2012, 2012-2016)

Member, Provincial Economic Council, Dominican Province of the Philippines (2013-2015)

Member, Board of Trustees, Santuario de Santo Domingo, Inc. (2012-2015)

Master of Students, Dominican Studentate (2008-2012)

Regent of Studies, Dominican Province of the Philippines (2004-2008)

Vice Rector, University of Santo Tomas, Manila (September 2007-May 2008)

Director, Institute of Religion, University of Santo Tomas, Manila (2004-2008)

Vice Rector for Finance, University of Santo Tomas, Manila (November 2006-September 2007)

Vice Rector for Religious Affairs, University of Santo Tomas, Manila (October 2006)

Regional Promoter for Justice, Peace, Care of Creation, Dominican Family, Asia-Pacific Region, (2003-2006)

Chairperson, Dominican Formators' Conference of the Philippines (2008-2011)

Provincial Promoter, Dominican Volunteers' Philippines (2004-2006)

Assistant Treasurer, University of Santo Tomas, Manila (2003-2004)

Provincial Promoter for Justice and Peace, Dominican Province of the Philippines  
(1996-1999)

Head, Provincial Secretariat, Dominican Province of the Philippines (1997-1999)

Assistant to the Master of Students, Dominican Studentate(1995-1996)

Editor-in-chief, *Colloquia Manilana*, Philippine Dominican Center of Institutional  
Studies, (1993-1996, 2008-2012)

Member, Editorial Board, *Regional Bulletin*, Dominican Family Leaders' Conference,  
Asia Pacific Region (2004-2007)

previously, a member of:

Dominicans for Justice and Peace  
International Commission for Justice, Peace and Care of Creation  
Order of Preachers  
United Nations Human Rights Council  
Geneva, Switzerland  
2003-2006

Permanent Commission on Intellectual Life of the Order of Preachers  
2006-2010

Conferences attended:

1. *6th Provincial Chapter of the Dominican Province of the Philippines*, in the  
Convent of St. Albert the Great, Calamba, Laguna/Caleruega, October 1996  
[*Capitular Delegate, Socius to the Prior of Santo Domingo Convent*].
2. Regional Conference on Justice, Peace and Care of Creation, Dominican  
Family, Asia-Pacific, Sydney, Australia, September 1998; [*national co-  
promoter/country delegate*]
3. "Announcing a Year of Favor of the Lord," Catholic Biblical Association of the  
Philippines, 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2000; [*observer*]
4. Meeting of the International Commission on Justice, Peace and Care of  
Creation, Dominican Family, Rome, Italy, June 2003; [*regional (Asia-Pacific)  
co-promoter*]

5. Meeting of Regional Promoters and Zonal Liaisons, Justice, Peace and Care of Creation, Dominican Family, Asia-Pacific, General Santos City, March 2004 [*co-organizer*].
6. “*Ethical Dimensions in the Teaching of Jesus and Paul*,” Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2004; [*member*].
7. Meeting of the Regents of Studies, Order of Preachers, Asia-Pacific University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, June 2005 [*co-organizer*].
8. “*Scripture and the Quest for a New Society*,” Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2005; [*member*].
9. Dominican Family Leaders’ Conference, Asia-Pacific Region, Multan, Pakistan, February 2006; [*regional (Asia-Pacific) co-promoter*].
10. Meeting of International Commissions and Governing Bodies of the Dominican Family, Fanjeaux-Prouille, France, April-May 2006; [*regional (Asia-Pacific) co-promoter of JPCC*].
11. *Conference on Inter-faith Dialogue*, Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines (ACUP), Notre Dame of Marbel University, Koronadal City, South Cotabato, May 2006 [*UST delegate*].
12. “*Biblical Responses to the Poor and the Marginalized*,” Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2006; [*member*].
13. Regional Conference on Justice, Peace and Care of Creation, Dominican Family, Asia-Pacific, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, October 2006 [*head organizer*].
14. “*Bible and Ecology*,” Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2007; [*member*].
15. *9<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter of the Dominican Province of the Philippines*, in the Convent of St. Raymond Penafort, Legazpi City, Albay, April 2008 [*Capitular Delegate, Socius to the Prior of St. Thomas Aquinas Priory; diffinitor*].
16. “*The Torah and Paul*,” Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2008; [*member*].
17. “*Return with Tenfold Zeal (Baruch 4,28)*,” Catholic Biblical Association of the

- Philippines, 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Tagaytay City, July 2009; [member].
18. "Doing Biblical Studies in East Asian Contexts," Joint Biblical Forum, Loyola School of Theology-Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, July 2010; [member].
  19. "Verbum Domini: The Word of the Lord in the Life and Mission of the Church," Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 12<sup>th</sup> annual convention, Tagaytay City, July 2011; [minor paper presenter: "Excavating Preaching: Towards an Archaeology and Exegesis of 'Preaching in the Synagogue' in Luke-Acts."]
  20. 10<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter of the Dominican Province of the Philippines, in the Convent of the Our Lady of the Rosary, Manaoag, Pangasinan/Rosaryville, Baguio, April 2012 [Capitular Delegate, Socius to the Prior of Santo Domingo Convent].
  21. "Jesus and Judaism in the Gospel of John," Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 13<sup>th</sup> annual convention, Tagaytay City, July 2012 [member]
  22. Praedicare: "Preaching the New Evangelization – Preachers. Portraits. Philippines." 1<sup>st</sup> Conference on Preaching, Institute of Preaching, Quezon City, April 30-May 02, 2013 [lead organizer]
  23. "Faith and Current Concerns," Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 14<sup>th</sup> annual convention, Institute of Preaching, Quezon City, July 2013 [convention host]
  24. "The Revolution," Catholic Social Media Summit, Version 2.0, Colegio de San Juan de Letran, Intramuros, Manila, November 2013 [participant].
  25. Praedicare: "Preaching the New Evangelization – Preachers. Portraits. Mindanao." 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Preaching, San Pedro College, Davao City, May 29-31, 2014 [lead organizer]
  26. Modular Course on the Renewal of Preaching, On-going Formation of the Clergy, Diocese of Paranaque, Club Balai Isabel, Batangas, June 24-27, 2014 [course facilitator]
  27. "Blessed are the poor," Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 15<sup>th</sup> annual convention, Institute of Preaching, Quezon City, July 2014 [convention host]

28. Joint Conference of the Society for New Testament Studies (Asia-Pacific) and the (16<sup>th</sup>) Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, Institute of Preaching, Quezon City, February 2015 [*conference host*]
29. *Praedicare: "Preaching the New Evangelization – Preachers. Portraits. Visayas."* 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Preaching, Molo, Iloilo City, April 24-26, 2015 [*lead organizer*]
30. "Vatican II and the Promise of Renewal," University of Saint Michael's College, Toronto, Canada, May 7-9, 2015 [*delegate*]
31. "Jubilee Year of Mercy," Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 17<sup>th</sup> annual convention, Betania, Tagaytay City, July 2016 [*delegate*]
32. *Global Colloquium on Dominican Preaching*, Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri, USA, October 2016 [*central committee member*]
33. *International Congress on the Mission of the Order of Preachers*, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Urbe, Rome, Italy, January 2017 [*central committee member*]
34. "Communion of Communities: Insights from the Bible and Archaeology," Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines, 18<sup>th</sup> annual convention, Tagaytay City, 15-16 July 2017 [*delegate*]
35. "Vade, Praedica" *Regional Colloquium on Dominican Preaching in Asia-Pacific*, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, October 2017 [*lead organizer*]

#### Publications:

##### 2014

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. Review of Emmanuel Mufti and Mark Peace, "Teaching and Learning and the Curriculum: A Critical Introduction," (London 2012), in *Epikeia, The Interdisciplinary Journal of Alternative Education and Formation*, vol. 6, no. 6, 2013-2014.

##### 2013

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. EXCAVATING PREACHING: ARCHAEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS OF PREACHING IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN LUKE-ACTS. *pars dissertationis ad lauream in Facultate Sacrae Theologiae*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas, May 2013; 192 pp.



Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "READING ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE SYNAGOGUE OF THE FIRST CENTURY CE," in *Veritatis Amor: UST Student Journal of Theology*, Vol. XVIII (2013): 3-50.

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "READING 'PREACHING IN THE SYNAGOGUE' IN LUKE-ACTS," in *Colloquia Manilana*, vol. 21 (2013): 3-63.

#### 2010

Blasa, Erwin and Clarence Victor C Marquez, OP [thesis adviser]. "TOWARDS A SOTERIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PAKIKIRAMAY," *Philippiniana Sacra* (XLV, 134, May-August 2010): 376-400.

Padilla, Wenifredo III, OP and Clarence Victor C Marquez, OP [thesis adviser]. "TOWARDS A SHEPHERD SPIRITUALITY," *Philippiniana Sacra* (XLV, 135, September-December 2010): 610-670.

#### 2009

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD IN 1 MACCABEES: A PORTRAIT OF POWER," *Colloquia Manilana*, vol. 17 (2009): 5-28.

#### 2008

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "MORAL DEMANDS OF THE KINGDOM?" UST Theology Week: Catholic Education and Professional Ethics in the Philippines: Challenges and Perspectives. Manila: UST, 16 April 2007; published in *Colloquia Manilana* (16: 2008) 5-15; also in *Theology Week 2007: Catholic Education and Professional Ethics in the Philippines: Challenges and Perspectives*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2008.

#### 2007

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "OF GOD AND CAESAR: Exegesis of Luke 20, 25: 'then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God,'" Canon Law Week. Manila: UST, January 2007.

#### 2006

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "ANG MUKHA NG DUKHA: Contemplating Poverty in Scripture and Culture," OPTHEO (Dominican Family Theological Convention) Manila: UST, August 2006. (unpublished)

#### 2005

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "READING 'MISSION' IN LUKE-ACTS" Asia-Pacific Dominican Formators' Course, Caleruega, Philippines, January 2005. (unpublished)

2004

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "NEW TESTAMENT COMPASSION: FROM BODY TOWARDS THEOLOGY," *Philippiniana Sacra* (XXXIX-116: May-August 2004) 337-348; also in *Theology Week 2004: Love, Compassion, Solidarity in a Globalized World, Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Theology week of the Faculty of Sacred Theology, in cooperation with The Graduate School and the Institute of Religion*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2005.

2003

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "A HISTORY OF HELL: THROUGH TERRAIN, TEXT, THEOLOGY," *Colloquia Manilana*, vol. 11 (2003): 3-19.

2002

Marquez, Clarence Victor C, OP. "BIBLICAL CHASTITY AND FILIPINO LAMBING: TOUCHING VOW AND CULTURE (2002)," and "CARING TO BE CHASTE (1996)," *AT NANAHAN SA ATIN: Coming Home to the Roots of the Filipino Religious*. Q. Pedregosa, G. Timoner, C. Marquez, eds. QC: Asia-Pacific Dominican Formation Center, 2002.